



**INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION
EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION**



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Turkey: Trials against trade unionists

Prime Minister,

We are writing to you on behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) which represents more than 176 million workers in 161 countries and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) which represents 60 million workers in 36 European countries including Turkey to once again strongly denounce the Turkish government's anti-union attacks as well as the abuse of the Turkish legal and judicial system by the authorities, an abuse that hinders the trade union movement and in particular the Confederation of Public Sector Workers' Unions (KESK), an ITUC and ETUC affiliate.

In January, the ITUC and the ETUC will join the international trade union delegations attending the court hearings of cases targeting members of KESK.

On January 13th, the first hearing of the case of 502 persons – one of the highest number of defendants ever tried – including the President and General Secretary of KESK and other KESK members, will be held in Ankara. The charges are causing damage to public properties and using inappropriate violence during a strike and demonstration on 28-29 March 2012 in Ankara. This demonstration attended by thousands of public employees aimed to protest the draft law No. 4688 on Public Employees Trade Unions and a draft amendment to the Law on Education. The police ended the demonstration violently. As a result of the police attack, two demonstrators were severely wounded. A complaint was lodged against the police officers for the damages caused by their violent attack but no criminal proceeding has been launched.

On 23-24 January, the first hearing of a lawsuit against KESK's members and leaders will be held in Istanbul. They were arrested during a police raid carried out 19th February

2013 in the whole country. The police raided the headquarters of the public sector union in Ankara and searched KESK's members' residence as well as the public buildings, schools, clinics and offices where they work. Overall, more than 150 persons were arrested on that day, and 47 of them were kept in prisons pending trials including 27 in Istanbul. Court hearings had already been heard in Adana, Bursa, Ismir and Malatya often leading to the release pending trials of unionists detained for months.

By attending these hearings, the ITUC and the ETUC are showing solidarity and support to our unfairly prosecuted Turkish brothers and sisters. It also aims once again to strongly denounce the on-going attacks and judicial harassment against unionists in Turkey. The repression of the trade union movement through constant intimidation, harassment and repression of trade unions leaders and activities has been increasing in Turkey since 2008. Trade union rights violations in Turkey have regularly been put on the agenda of the annual International Labour Conference in Geneva.

Turkey has been a long-standing member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and as such, the ITUC and the ETUC would like to remind your government that the harassment and detention of trade union leaders and activists because of their legitimate democratic activities are serious violations of the ILO Convention 87 on freedom of association and Convention 98 on collective bargaining – both ratified by your country - as well as the European Social Charter of the Council of Europe - ratified by your country - and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.

In October 2013, the EU Commission has released the Turkey 2013 Progress Report in which the Commission presents its assessment of what each candidate have achieved over the last year. This report clearly and repeatedly mentions the arrests and prosecution of KESK members. The ITUC and the ETUC understands that the European Commission and the Turkish authorities High Level Working Group on Social Issues, including social partners, will soon meet. The ITUC and the ETUC will ensure that trade union rights in Turkey remain high on the agenda and certainly one of the benchmarks for opening Chapter 19 on Social Policy and Employment.

In its November 2013 joint report on Trade Union Rights Situation in Turkey, the EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) mentions the arrests of trade unionists and civil society activists and the long pre-trial detention without clear charges brought against them as well as the fact that their trade union activities are used as evidence against them. The JCC clearly calls for the respect of “basic democratic rights including trade union rights”.

The ITUC and the ETUC call your Government to immediately release all the union members arrested under unproven connections to illegal organisations, to lift all bans on meetings and demonstrations and also call Turkey to abide by its European and international obligations to secure the human and trade union rights and freedoms of its workers.

The ITUC and the ETUC, along with the international trade union movement including the Global Union Federations, will remain united in denouncing and campaigning against those violations as well as in expressing solidarity with and support for Turkish trade unions.

We sincerely trust that your Government will act swiftly on these requests.



Sharan Burrow
ITUC General Secretary



Bernadette Ségol
ETUC General Secretary

Copy to:

- Ambassador Selim Yenel, Permanent Delegate of Turkey to the EU
- Ambassador Mehmet Hakan Olcay, Turkish Embassy, Brussels
- Ambassador Jean-Maurice Ripert, Head of Delegation of the European Union to Turkey
- Umit Deniz Efendioglu, Director, ILO office for Ankara
- Stefan Füller, EU Commissioner for Enlargement
- László Andor, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion,
- Stavros Lambrinidis, EU Human Rights Special Representative,
- Barbara Lochbihler, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights,
- Hélène FLAUTRE, Chair of the European Parliament delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)
- Cveto Stantič, EESC Member, Co-chairman of the EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee