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Statement Condemning the Arbitrary Detention of Şebnem Korur Fincancı in Türkiye

The New York City Bar Association (The City Bar) strongly condemns the arbitrary detention of the prominent Turkish human rights defender Şebnem Korur Fincancı¹ on October 26, 2022, in Istanbul. The arbitrary detention of Şebnem Korur Fincancı follows her public remarks about allegations on the use of chemical weapons by the Government of Türkiye in the Kurdistan regional federation of Iraq, and her call for an urgent investigation into these allegations.²

Following Şebnem Korur Fincancı’s return to Türkiye and in reaction to her statements on the use of chemical weapons, on October 25, 2022 President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced “legal measures” and whatever it takes to stop the Turkish Medical Association, and Şebnem Korur Fincancı in particular.

The City Bar notes with regret that in particular since July 2016, the Government of Türkiye continues to increasingly harass, imprison and sometimes subject human rights defenders, journalists, members of minority groups and political opposition to torture, because of their work. Women human rights defenders, as Şebnem Korur Fincancı in the instant case, are particularly at risk and are not only targeted for their human rights work but also because of their gender, social norms, and traditions they challenge.

The City Bar further notes that this is not the first time Professor Korur Fincancı has been targeted for her human rights activities. She was already prosecuted and arbitrarily detained for 10 days for

¹ Şebnem Korur Fincancı is President of the Turkish Medical Association (Türk Tabipler Birliği – TTB) and Board Member of the Human Rights Foundation of Türkiye (HRFT).

² Turkish doctor detained for proposing chemical weapons probe, AP News (Oct. 26, 2022), <https://apnews.com/article/europe-middle-east-turkey-iraq-istanbul-11d0587825040f2d79d1e5932dc2c162>

alleged “terrorist propaganda” in 2016³, and also convicted in 2021 on bogus charges of allegedly “insulting a public official.”⁴

The City Bar urges the authorities of Türkiye to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release Şebnem Korur Fincancı, who is being punished solely for her legitimate human rights activities;
- Guarantee in all circumstances the physical integrity and psychological well-being of Şebnem Korur Fincancı and all human rights defenders in Türkiye;
- Put an end to all acts of harassment against Şebnem Korur Fincancı and all other human rights defenders in Türkiye.

The City Bar calls on the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and other relevant Special Procedure mandate holders of the Human Rights Council to address a joint allegation letter to the Government of Türkiye, urging the authorities to renew their commitment to the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders⁵ and ensure in all circumstances that Turkish human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate activities without any hindrance and fear of reprisals.⁶

About the Association

The mission of the New York City Bar Association, which was founded in 1870 and has over 23,000 members, is to equip and mobilize a diverse legal profession to practice with excellence, promote reform of the law, and uphold the rule of law and access to justice in support of a fair society and the public interest in our community, our nation, and throughout the world.

³ See Physicians for Human Rights, <https://phr.org/people/sebnem-korur-fincanci/>

⁴ Paul Kirby, Turkey arrests doctors' chief for 'terror propaganda', BBC News (Oct. 26, 2022), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63397922>

⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-human-rights-defenders/declaration-human-rights-defenders#:~:text=The%20declaration%3A,fundamental%20freedoms%20through%20peaceful%20means.>

⁶ See Türkiye: UN experts call for release and end of judicial harassment of anti-torture expert (Nov. 8, 2022), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/11/turkiye-un-experts-call-release-and-end-judicial-harassment-anti-torture>