



Joint Statement

9 November 2023

Widespread mistreatment of lawyers in Turkey

This week, a delegation of 21 bar associations, human rights organisations and legal groups representing eight countries gathered in Turkey for a fact-finding mission on the Turkish government’s treatment of criminal law and human rights lawyers. *

A joint statement by the delegation said:

“As the mission draws to a close, we are distressed that lawyers in Turkey continue to face ongoing harassment, arbitrary detention, unfair trials, torture and ill-treatment.

“Lawyers in Turkey are arrested, detained and imprisoned simply due to their legal work - including clients they represent and professional bodies to which they belong.

“Many of the lawyers we visited in prison are members of the Progressive Lawyers Association (ÇHD) and the People’s Law Office (HHB). They have practised in criminal and human rights law for many years and prove that the Turkish government is systemically targeting lawyers who defend the fundamental human rights of the people of Turkey.

“Furthermore, when these lawyers find themselves detained, they are denied the right to a fair trial. Many have been held since 2017/2018, following unfair trials and ineffective legal assistance.

“We are also gravely concerned about the conditions of their detentions, which violate internationally-accepted standards for prisons, including the U.N. Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. Detentions continue to be arbitrary and are prolonged with little justification or explanation. They have restricted access to family members and are held in isolating conditions, often able to interact with only two or three other detainees. Disciplinary measures are being applied to deny the lawyers’ conditional release. We are extremely concerned that at least two of the lawyers, Mr. Ünsal and Mr. Gökoğlu, have reported being subjected to torture.

“The mistreatment of lawyers, from arbitrary detention to unfair trials and torture, is a clear violation of Turkey’s legal obligations to the international community.

“The Turkish government’s intimidation tactics have a chilling effect on the rule of law and Turkish citizens’ access to justice. They foster a climate of fear and insecurity for lawyers working in criminal law and human rights defence.

“We demand the Turkish government halt all acts of intimidation and harassment targeting lawyers and respect the independence of the legal profession, in accordance with international law, including the U.N. Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

“We will continue to monitor the situation of lawyers in Turkey and ensure the Turkish government complies with the standards of international human rights.”

Notes to editors

- *The delegation visited Turkey between 6 and 9 November 2023. Members of the delegation include:
 1. Bologna Bar Association
 2. Bordeaux Bar Association
 3. Brussels Bar Association
 4. Catalan Association for the Defence of Human Rights
 5. Defense Sans Frontiere - Avocats Solidaires
 6. European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH)
 7. European Democratic Lawyers (AED)
 8. Fédération des Barreaux d’Europe (FBE)
 9. Grenoble Bar Association Human Rights Institute
 10. International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL)
 11. International Observatory of Lawyers (OIAD)
 12. Lawyers for Lawyers
 13. Law Society of England and Wales
 14. Legal Centre Lesvos
 15. La Conférence des Bâtonniers – France
 16. Le Syndicat des Avocats de France
 17. Le Syndicat des Avocats pour la Démocratie, Belgium
 18. Marseille Bar Association
 19. Nantes Bar Association
 20. New York City Bar Association

21. Rennes Bar Association
22. Rotterdam Bar Association
23. The Association of Legal Aid Lawyers in Amsterdam (VSAN)
24. The Center of Research and Elaboration on Democracy/ Legal international Intervention Group (CRED, GiGi)
25. The Defence Commission of the Barcelona Bar Association
26. The Order of the French- and German-speaking Bars of Belgium
27. Union Internationale des Avocats – Institute for Rule of Law (UIA-IROL)

About the Law Society

The Law Society is the independent professional body that works globally to support and represent solicitors, promoting the highest professional standards, the public interest and the rule of law.

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