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Turkey: Global figures join call to “end gross injustice” as trial of Amnesty Chair and Director and other rights activists resumes

Edward Snowden, Catherine Deneuve, Sting, Ai Weiwei, Pilar del Río, Angélique Kidjo, Anish Kapoor, Francois Morel and MPs sign open letter

More than 70 renowned cultural and political figures have come together to demand that Turkish authorities drop trumped-up terrorism charges against 11 human rights defenders, including Amnesty International’s Turkey Director and Chair.

The call made by more than 30 politicians and scores of artists – including Edward Snowden, Sting, Ai Weiwei, Pilar del Río, Anish Kapoor, Catherine Deneuve, Angélique Kidjo – comes as the trial of the 11 resumes in Istanbul on charges which carry jail terms of up to 15 years.

“We are proud to add our voices to the global demand to end this gross injustice and to immediately and unconditionally release Taner Kılıç from jail,” they write in the letter.

“When human rights defenders are silenced, all our rights are put at risk. They are the ones that stand up for us. Now we must stand up for them.”

Amnesty International’s Turkey Chair, Taner Kılıç, was detained on 6 June and sent to jail three days later, where he has been ever since. Ten other activists, including İdil Eser, the Director of Amnesty Turkey, were detained a month later. Seven of them were remanded in Turkey’s highest security Silivri prison, with one remanded at Ankara’s Sincan Prison. The eight were held for almost four months and released last month at their first hearing. They are all accused of “membership of a terrorist organization”.

The charges against the 11 include outlandish claims that standard human rights work amounts to ‘assisting terrorist organizations’.

Taner Kılıç is alleged to have downloaded and used the ByLock messaging application, which the prosecution has claimed was used by the Gülen movement to communicate with each other. However, two independent forensic analyses of Taner's phone commissioned by Amnesty International found that there is no trace of ByLock ever having been on his phone. So far, the prosecution have not provided any evidence to prove their claim. The forensic expert who prepared the detailed reports is expected to appear at the trial on 22 November.

The signatories join a long list of governments, institutions and political figures that have demanded Taner's release including the European Commission, the US State Department, UN officials, Angela Merkel and the German government as well as the Austrian, Irish and Belgian governments.

More than 20 British MPs have so far signed a parliamentary motion tabled last week calling for the immediate release of Taner and the dropping of charges against the 11. This follows similar calls last month by 22 members of the US Congress including 14 Senators as well as the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, the President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, and the Chair of the Human Rights Committee in the European Parliament, Pier Antonio Panzeri.

"What we are witnessing is a massive groundswell of opinion against what is clearly a politically motivated prosecution aimed at silencing critical voices within the country," said Aakar Patel, the Director of Amnesty India, who is attending the trial.

"This trial has served not only to remind people of the importance of human rights, but the vital role played by those that defend them. The time has come for Taner to be released and for the charges against him and the Istanbul 10 to be dropped," said Fernando Nabais da Furriela, the Chair of Amnesty International Brazil, who is also attending the trial.

Notes to editors:

The 11 defendants are set to have their second hearing in Istanbul on 22 November at the 35th Heavy Penal Court (starting at 10am).

Amnesty International will have teams monitoring the trials and available for interview.

For Amnesty International's analysis of the cases:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/7329/2017/en/>

and

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Background

The Istanbul 10 were attending a workshop on wellbeing and digital security on 5 July when police raided the building and detained them all. On 4 October an Istanbul prosecutor filed an indictment against the so-called Istanbul 10 and Taner Kılıç, who, it claims was aware of preparations for the Büyükada workshop and was in contact with İdil and another of the defendants. At his trial on 26 October, the judge accepted the prosecutor's application to join Taner's case with the case against the other 10 human rights defenders.

The ten human rights defenders are İdil Eser (Amnesty International), Günel Kurşun (Human Rights Agenda Association), Özlem Dalkıran (Citizens' Assembly), Veli Acu (Human Rights Agenda Association), Ali Gharavi (IT strategy consultant), Peter Steudtner (non-violence and wellbeing trainer), İlknur Üstün (Women's Coalition), Nalan Erkem (Citizens Assembly), Şeyhmus Özbekli (Rights Initiative) and Nejat Taştan (Association for Monitoring Equal Rights).

More than 700,000 people have signed Amnesty International actions calling for the release of Taner and the dropping of the charges against the Istanbul 10: [PT]: [Liberdade para Idil Eser, Taner Kiliç e todos os defensores de direitos humanos](#)

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