

29 March 2016

Turkey - Worsening conditions of detention of imprisoned academics for peace

On 15 March 2016, academics Ms **Esra Mungan** of Boğaziçi University, Mr **Kıvanç Ersoy** of Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, and Mr **Muzaffer Kaya**, formerly of Nişantaşı University, were arrested on charges of terrorism and taken into detention pending an investigation in connection with their signing of the Petition for Peace, a petition calling for an end to violent actions by the Government in Turkey's south-east region. Esra Mungan has since been moved to a smaller cell in solitary confinement, while Kıvanç Ersoy and Muzaffer Kaya have been transferred from their original place of detention, subjected to ill-treatment, and also placed in solitary confinement.

Esra Mungan, Kıvanç Ersoy and Muzaffer Kaya are members of **Academics for Peace**, a group that unites more than 2,000 individuals supporting peace in the south-east of Turkey. They are among the 1128 signatories of a petition released in January 2016 calling for an end to violence in the region.

On 24 March 2016, Esra Mungan was transferred from her original cell in Bakirkoy prison to a smaller cell with very poor hygienic conditions. She has been held in solitary confinement since her arrest. On the same date, Muzaffer Kaya and Kıvanç Ersoy were transferred to the Silivri Prison, where according to the information received, they were searched while naked, and then forced to remain naked for 20 minutes before being placed in solitary confinement. Books were also seized from them. Colleagues of the academics have began a vigil in front of both Bakirkoy and Silivri Prison.

On 14 March 2016, the three academics were brought before a prosecutor, who arrested them pending investigation for “propagating for a terrorist organization”. The investigation was opened after a speech given by the three academics at a press conference at the Education and Science Workers’ Union’s in Istanbul on 10 March 2016. During the press conference, the three stated their intention to continue their work, despite the repression and “legal and verbal war” which they claim has been initiated against academics following the release of January petition calling for peace in the Kurdish region.

On 21 January 2016, 27 academics were detained and accused of spreading terrorist propaganda, before later being released. On 14 January 2016, the Turkish Prosecutors office launched an investigation over possible charges against academics for insulting the state and engaging in terrorist propaganda. Several signatories to the Petition for Peace have been dismissed from their work, suspended, put under administrative and criminal investigation, and subjected to smear campaigns and physicals threats. On 12 January 2016, at a conference of Ambassadors, President Erdogan targeted signatories to the petition, stating: “Some people who call themselves academics defame Turkey for protecting its land and threaten the people in the region”. Turkey's Council of High Education (YÖK), a regulatory body of Turkish Universities, released a statement concerning the petition, which stated: “This declaration which supports terrorism cannot be associated with academic freedom. (...) We will do the necessary about this declaration within the scope of law.”

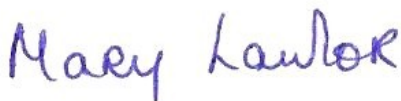
On 11 January 2016, the Petition for Peace was released, condemning the violent actions by the Government in the south-eastern part of Turkey, which have resulted in numerous human rights violations. Signatories called for the lifting of the curfew imposed in the area, access for international observers to the region, and the opening of negotiations to “create a road map that would lead to a lasting peace which includes the demands of the Kurdish political movement”.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Turkey to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Esra Mungan, Kıvanç Ersoy and Muzaffer Kaya, and close the investigation against them, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being held solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Immediately cease all persecution, harassment and intimidatory acts targeting signatories to the Petition for Peace and academics in Turkey;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Turkey are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 6 (b): “*Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (b) As provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms,*” and to Article 12 (2): “*The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.*”

Yours sincerely,



Mary Lawlor

Executive Director