

## URGENT APPEAL - THE OBSERVATORY

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**New information**  
**TUR 003 / 0618 / OBS 087.2**  
Sentencing/  
Judicial harassment  
**Turkey**  
May 28, 2019

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a partnership of FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), has received new information and requests your intervention in the following situation in **Turkey**.

### **New information:**

The Observatory has been informed by reliable sources about the sentencing of human rights lawyer and co-president of the Human Rights Association (İHD) Ms. **Eren Keskin**<sup>1</sup> and her ongoing judicial harassment. An honorary member of the Paris Bar Association, Eren Keskin is the winner of multiple international awards for her peace and human rights work, including the 2018 Helsinki Civil Society Award<sup>2</sup>, and was the 2018 finalist of Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders<sup>3</sup>.

According to the information received, on May 21, 2019, İstanbul 14th Heavy Penal Court convicted Ms. Eren Keskin for “propaganda on half of a terrorist organisation” - namely the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) - under Article 7(2) of the Anti-Terror Law No. 3713), and sentenced her to 3 years and 9 months of prison. Ms. Eren Keskin attended this final hearing, which was also followed by foreign diplomats. The sentence will be taken to the Regional Court of Appeal.

Since 2016, Ms. Eren Keskin and seven other defendants, columnists or rotating editors of the closed newspaper *Özgür Gündem*, have faced charges for “disrupting the unity of the state”, “openly inciting to commit crime”, “being a member of a terrorist group”, “propagandizing for a terrorist organization” and “publishing and spreading statements of terrorist organisations” in relation with articles published in *Özgür Gündem* (see background information below).

The Observatory firmly condemns the sentencing and judicial harassment of Ms. Eren Keskin, as it seems to be merely aimed at punishing her for her human rights activities and her legitimate exercise of her right to freedom of expression.

### **Background information:**

On March 30, 2018, İstanbul's 2nd Criminal Court of First Instance sentenced Eren Keskin to seven and a half years in jail in relation to some articles published in *Özgür Gündem* during the time when she was co-editor-in chief. According to the court's decision, the articles have “degraded” the Turkish nation and “insulted” the Turkish president.

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<sup>1</sup> For almost thirty years, she has contributed to the protection of minority rights, countered violence against women, and campaigned to challenge militarism and end torture. She is the founder of a legal office providing *pro bono* services for transgender persons and women who were raped or sexually abused by the national security forces. From 2013 to 2016, Eren Keskin held the title of ‘co-editor-in-chief’ for *Özgür Gündem* (‘Free Agenda’), as a form of support of the imprisoned editorial staff.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.nhc.nl/helsinki-civil-society-award-2018-goes-to-eren-keskin/>

<sup>3</sup> See FIDH Press Release published on May 13, 2019: <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/europe-central-asia/turkey/turkey-fidh-supports-the-human-rights-activist-eren-keskin>

On October 10, 2018, in the tenth hearing held in the *Özgür Gündem* main case, the Istanbul 23<sup>rd</sup> High Criminal Court ordered to lift Ms. Eren Keskin's international travel ban as an interim ruling. The trial, which started in December 2016, was then postponed again until January 17, 2019. Travel bans issued against her in other pending trials remain active.

A total of 143 cases have been lodged against Eren Keskin. Some of these lawsuits/case files have been combined by the courts. 12 of these lawsuits have been finalized, five are still pending before the Supreme Court of Appeals (or the Court of Cassation), while seven are pending before the Court of Appeals. As a result of these cases, the courts sentenced Ms. Keskin to a total of 12.5 years in prison and 460,000 TL (around 70,000 Euros) in fines. Out of the files imposing fines on Ms. Keskin in the amount of 158,000 TL (around 24,000 Euros) have been finalized, while the sentences totaling to 12.5 years in prison and the remainder of the fines are still pending before the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of Appeals (or the Court of Cassation).

In addition, Eren Keskin's ongoing work as a human rights lawyer has also been challenged: the legal team of the Office of the President of Turkey filed an application to the Istanbul Bar Association in August 2018 requesting the Bar to launch a disciplinary investigation against Ms. Keskin, which may result in disbarment. The investigation is still pending.

#### **Actions requested:**

Please write to the authorities of Turkey asking them to:

- i. Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Ms. Eren Keskin;
- ii. Put an end to all forms of harassment, including at the judicial level, against Ms. Eren Keskin and against all human rights defenders in Turkey;
- iii. Comply with all the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1998, in particular its Articles 1, 6(a), 9, 11 and 12.2;
- iv. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Turkey.

#### **Addresses:**

- President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Fax: (+90 312) 525 58 31
- Prime Minister of Turkey Binali Yıldırım. Email: [ozelkalem@basbakanlik.gov.tr](mailto:ozelkalem@basbakanlik.gov.tr)
- Minister of Justice, Mr. Bekir Bozdağ. E-mail: [ozelkalem@adalet.gov.tr](mailto:ozelkalem@adalet.gov.tr)
- Minister of Interior, Mr. Süleyman Soylu. Fax: +90 (312) 425 61 30
- Ambassador Izzet Selim Yenel, Diplomatic Mission of Turkey to the European Union in Brussels, Belgium. Fax: + 32 2 511 04 50
- Ambassador Mr. Ali Naci Korum, Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. Email: [mission.turkey@ties.itu.int](mailto:mission.turkey@ties.itu.int)

Please also write to the diplomatic missions or embassies of Turkey in your respective country.

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Paris-Geneva, May 28, 2019

Kindly inform us of any action undertaken quoting the code of this appeal in your reply.

*The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders. FIDH and OMCT are both members of [ProtectDefenders.eu](https://www.protectdefenders.eu), the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.*

To contact the Observatory, call the emergency line:

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