



Union Internationale des Avocats
International Association of Lawyers
Unión Internacional de Abogados

Rassembler les avocats du monde • Bringing Together the World's Lawyers • Reunir a los abogados del mundo

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Rome, March 11, 2019

Turkish Embassy in Rome,
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To the kind attention of:
H. E. Murat Salim ESENLİ, Esq.
Ambassador of Turkey in Italy

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Your Excellency,

Re: Endangered lawyers

The Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA – International Association of lawyers) is a multi-cultural organization supporting the legal profession, promoting the rule of law and defending the independence and freedom of lawyers worldwide.

The Italian Committee of the UIA, on occasion of the 2019 Day of the Endangered Lawyer, fully supports the UIA's position, expressing its deepest concern about the recurrent persecution and torture of Turkish lawyers.

Recent reports show that in 2017, as a consequence of the misapplication of counter-terrorism laws, dozens of bar associations were closed, many of which represented victims of physical abuses; more than 500 lawyers were arrested; 1480 were prosecuted; and 79 were sentenced to long prison terms.

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Over time, it has become clear that such widespread and systematic attacks against lawyers are deliberately designed to incite tension among those exercising the legal profession, which prevents them from working independently and defending their clients effectively.

We refer in particular, but not only, to the following colleagues:

Muharrem Erbey, former vice president of İnsan Hakları Derneği - IHD - and former President of the IHD Diyarbakir Section, writer and winner of the 2012 Ludovic-Trarieux International Human Rights Prize. He was sentenced on March 28, 2017, to six years and three months in prison for "belonging to a terrorist organization".

Taner Kiliç, President of Amnesty International Turkey, who was arrested in Izmir on June 6, 2017 along with 22 other lawyers in the context of operations against the Gülen organization by President Erdoğan. He remained in detention for 14 months.

Özlem Gümüştas and Sezin Uçar, members of the "Law Firm of the Oppressed" (EHB), were arrested on October 18, 2017, before a hearing of the Suruç Massacre case they monitored. Both lawyers were accused of "belonging to an illegal organization" and disseminating "propaganda for a banned organization". They were released and placed under judicial supervision on October 5, 2018.

Selçuk Kozağaçlı, human rights defender and Secretary General of the Progressive Lawyers Association (ÇHD), who was arrested on November 8, 2017 in Istanbul and charged with allegedly being a member of a terrorist organization. 19 other colleagues are prosecuted in the same court case.

Ramazan Demir, Secretary General of the Association of Lawyers for Freedom (ÖHD), known for his interventions in cases concerning police brutality. He was arrested on March 16, 2016, together with 11 other lawyers who represented the 46 Turkish lawyers arrested in 2012 in a separate case. He was released on September 7, 2016 and sentenced to 11 months and 20 days in prison for insulting President Erdoğan on January 12, 2018.

As acknowledged in the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (the Havana Principles), lawyers play a fundamental role in upholding the rule of law, in the correct administration of justice and in the protection of the rights of all.

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That is why, in joining the international legal community's movement in support of Turkish lawyers, we urge you to intercede with the Turkish authorities concerned, assuring that the Turkish government fully complies with the Havana Principles, by stopping any form of intimidation, releasing those who have been arbitrarily detained and taking every necessary measure to ensure that the legal profession can be exercised independently and in the clients' best interest.

We thank you very much for your kind attention to this urgent matter.

Respectfully yours,

Avv. Claudio COGGIATTI