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## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# TURKEY MUST FREE CIVIL SOCIETY LEADER OSMAN KAVALA

As civil society leader Osman Kavala marks one year in Turkey's highest security prison, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch renewed their call for his immediate and unconditional release.

One year on since a court ruled that Osman Kavala be remanded in Silivri prison near Istanbul, no indictment outlining the precise charges against him has yet been issued by the prosecuting authorities. Neither Osman Kavala, nor his family or lawyers have been shown the evidence to back up the vague allegations levelled against him, allegations which form the basis of his prolonged and punitive prison detention.

Osman Kavala was first detained by police on 18 October 2017 at Istanbul's Atatürk airport as he arrived on a flight from Gaziantep, eastern Turkey. He was returning from a visit with representatives of the Goethe Institute to the province, where he supports projects for Syrian refugees. In the following days and weeks, a smear campaign was mounted against him in the pro-government media using details leaked from the investigation. These media reports alleged that Osman Kavala was questioned about having links with the alleged organizers of the July 2016 failed coup attempt; one year on, no credible evidence has been provided to substantiate these baseless allegations.

Osman Kavala has dedicated his life to promoting civil society and culture in Turkey. Over the past three decades, Osman Kavala has provided support to many independent human rights organizations and helped establish a number of civil society organizations, including the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (now the Citizens' Assembly), an NGO working to advance human rights, and Anadolu Kültür, a cultural association that promotes understanding across Turkey's diverse communities. Osman Kavala's work has been grounded in advocating for cultural diversity in Turkey, for human rights, for mutual understanding and for resolving conflicts peacefully. His civil society activism has as its main goal the building of bridges between people from different regions in Turkey, as well as bridges across to Europe especially in the early days of Turkey's EU accession efforts.

The detention of Osman Kavala is only one example of the harsh crackdown by the government of Turkey on its critics: over the last two years, more than 1,500 organizations and foundations have been closed down, most of them during a state of emergency that allowed the government to rule by emergency decree, without parliamentary or judicial oversight. Peaceful protest has been suppressed. Despite the end of the state of emergency rule, those who criticize the government continue to risk criminal charges and lengthy pre-trial imprisonment. More than 150 journalists remain in prison. Since the July 2016 coup attempt, almost 130,000 public sector workers have been arbitrarily dismissed from their jobs for alleged 'links to terrorist organizations'.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch call for Osman Kavala's immediate and unconditional release. The organizations further urge Turkey's allies across the world to call for end the crackdown on civil society and to release of imprisoned journalists, human rights defenders and other civil society actors against whom the authorities have not provided evidence of internationally recognizable crimes.

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