

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### Turkey: Rights of May Day demonstrators at risk

On the eve of planned 1 May demonstrations, Amnesty International calls on the Turkish authorities to respect the rights of protestors. Authorities in Istanbul have again refused to allow demonstrations to take place in Taksim Square, the traditional location for 1 May demonstrations in the centre of the city. In addition to the denial of the right to peaceful assembly, protestors risk excessive police force, arbitrary detention and unfair prosecution. Amnesty International will send observers to demonstrations in Istanbul.

May Day 2015 looks set to follow a pattern of denial of the right to peaceful assembly leading to clashes between protestors and the police. In [2014 police used water cannon and tear gas against trade unionists, representatives of professional associations and civil society groups preparing to march towards Taksim Square](#). The central Taksim area was effectively closed off and 39,000 police officers and 50 water cannon trucks prevented access to the area.

Peaceful mass protests were held in Taksim in 2010, 2011 and 2012 when the authorities allowed them to take place. In a statement yesterday, repeating the 2014 statement, the Istanbul Governor's office cited [unspecified] security threats, disruption to tourism and traffic as justification for denying demonstrators the right to demonstrate in Taksim. The Istanbul authorities proposed other locations outside of the centre of the city for demonstrations.

A prosecution of the leaders of trade unions and professional associations for "provoking people to take part in unlawful demonstrations" in relation to attempts to hold 2014 May Day demonstrations in Taksim failed with the court finding that their actions were protected by national and international law guaranteeing the right to peaceful assembly. Cases brought against individuals following the 2013 Gezi Park for "participation in unlawful demonstrations" have also overwhelmingly ended in the acquittal of those accused. The European Court of Human Rights found the actions of authorities in forcibly dispersing demonstrators on 1 May 2008 attempting to march on Taksim to violate Article 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights (freedom of peaceful assembly) in the case of *Kesk and Disk v Turkey*.

Despite the clear findings of the national courts and the European Court of Human Rights the authorities continue to deny the right to peaceful assembly and use violence against demonstrators. In March, [the Parliament passed into law the "Domestic Security bill" containing further repressive provisions](#) providing the police with powers to detain people at the scene of demonstrations for up to 24 hours without judicial oversight and vaguely worded provisions expanding the authority of police to use firearms in contradiction with international standards on the use of force by police. The provisions allow police to use firearms in situations where "individuals or groups attack or attempt to attack police or others, workplaces, homes, public buildings, schools, dormitories, places of worship, vehicles using Molotov cocktails, explosive, combustible, injurious... or similar weapons."

In the last few years the Turkish authorities have clamped down on peaceful protests, in central Istanbul and elsewhere in the country. Allowing May Day protests to proceed would allow the authorities display a reversal of this trend.

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