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Turkey: Release detained journalists

Amnesty International calls on the Turkish authorities to release *Cumhuriyet* newspaper journalists Can Dündar and Erdem Gül who were remanded in pre-trial detention on 26 November 2015. Lawyers for the journalists applied to the Constitutional Court for their release on 6 December, after a previous application for release was rejected by a lower court. The detentions are yet another deplorable attempt by the authorities to silence dissenting voices in the Turkish press.

On 29 May, the Istanbul prosecutor announced a criminal investigation into Can Dündar, one of Turkey's most prominent journalists and the editor-in-chief of the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, and Erdem Gül, the newspaper's Ankara bureau chief, following the publication of articles about the alleged secret transfer of weapons to armed groups in Syria.

After a period of over 5 months since the announcement of the investigation, the defendants were questioned by the prosecutor. The prosecutor's request that they be placed in pre-trial detention was accepted by the court. The journalists are charged with 'procuring and disclosing information for the purposes of espionage, which should be kept confidential for the security of the state'. The journalists are also charged with assisting the so-called "Fetullah Gülen / Parallel State Structure terrorist organisation", which the authorities claim comprises of supporters of the influential preacher Fetullah Gülen seeking to undermine the government. On 1 June, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced on state television that he had filed personally criminal complaint against Can Dündar and the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, warning that they would "pay a high price" for their actions.

The charges against the journalists relate to articles published by the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper in May and June about the alleged transfer of weapons by Turkish security forces to armed groups opposed to President Assad in Syria. The journalists reported that trucks belonging to the National Intelligence Organisation (MİT) which had been stopped close to the Turkey-Syria border in January 2014 contained ammunitions. The convoy of trucks was stopped upon instructions from the local prosecutor and inspected by the prosecutor and members of the gendarmerie. Photographs and video footage of the ammunitions found in the trucks were published on the *Cumhuriyet* website. The Turkish authorities had previously denied any allegations of wrongdoing in relation to the incident, asserting that the trucks were transporting aid to the Turkmen minority in Syria. The

information revealed by the two journalists called into question the explanation offered by the authorities.

In a separate ongoing case, the four prosecutors and the commander of the local gendarmerie who stopped and inspected the trucks face criminal charges for their involvement in the incident. They are accused of procuring and disclosing secret information regarding state security and “attempting to overthrow the government of the Turkish republic through use of violence and coercion”.

In the recently published report [*Taking Stock: The Arming of the Islamic State*](#), Amnesty International calls for an end to all transfers of arms to groups in Syria that are implicated in human rights abuses and calls on Turkey and other neighbouring states to enhance border security to ensure any illicit flows of arms into Syria are obstructed. Rather than targeting journalists and state officials investigating the incident, the Turkish authorities should examine the allegations to ensure that no illicit transfers of arms into Syria is taking place at the Turkey-Syria border.

Amnesty International views the prosecution of Can Dündar and Erdem Gül as an attack on the right to freedom of expression and an example of the increasing pressure exerted by the Turkish government on journalists. This case is one of many in which Turkey’s broad anti-terror laws are being used to punish criticism of the government. Journalists should not face criminal charges simply for reporting on stories which are in the public interest.

Amnesty International calls on the Turkish authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Can Dündar and Erdem Gül and to drop all charges against them.

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