JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT

20 May 2024   AI Index Number: EUR 44/8044/2024

TÜRKİYE: GALATASARAY SQUARE MUST BE OPEN TO SATURDAY MOTHERS/PEOPLE

We, the undersigned international human rights organisations declare our solidarity with Saturday Mothers/People, who have been protesting since May 1995 for truth and justice for their forcibly disappeared loved ones.

As they approach their 1,000th weekly vigil on 25 May 2024, they are Türkiye’s longest standing peaceful protest. Over the last 29 years and in particular since August 2018, they have faced unlawful restrictions on their ability to peacefully protest by the authorities, excessive use of force in the hands of police, arbitrary detention, baseless criminal prosecutions and administrative harassment. These violations have been met with impunity. Riot police who used excessive force to disperse the 700th weekly vigil on 25 August 2018 have not faced investigation, but the 46 human rights defenders including relatives who were subjected to that excessive use of force and unlawfully detained are still on trial today. Another baseless prosecution of 20 people, again including relatives, started in February 2024.

Despite all the barriers put in their way, Saturday Mothers/People have not given up their commitment to finding out the truth about the circumstances of their loved ones’ enforced disappearances and bringing those responsible to justice. They have also been determined to maintain their weekly vigils in Galatasaray Square, which they describe as their meeting and remembrance place with loved ones, despite the repression by authorities over the years.

While we welcome Minister of Interior Ali Yerlikaya’s positive comments made in October 2023, which in early November led to the easing of the restrictions in Galatasaray Square, we are concerned that police barriers and presence, and the arbitrary limitation of the allowed number of persons in the vigil to ten people, remain and will continue to hinder the Saturday Mothers/People’s right to peacefully protest. The two Constitutional Court rulings adopted in November 2022 and March 2023, which found that the right to freedom of peaceful assembly of the applicants had been violated and that ordered for the violation not to be repeated, remain unimplemented to this day.

We call for the immediate lifting of the ongoing restrictions imposed on the relatives of the victims of enforced disappearances and on other human rights defenders in Türkiye, particularly of Saturday Mothers/People. We urge the authorities to respect, facilitate and protect, instead of limiting, the group’s right to gather in Galatasaray Square every Saturday to hold their peaceful protest.

Amnesty International
Article 19
Civicus
Civil Rights Defenders
Collectif des Familles de Disparus en Algérie

Euro-Mediterranean Federation Against Enforced Disappearances (FEMED)
EuroMed Rights
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Front Line Defenders
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders