

URGENT ACTION

TURKISH COURT ACQUITS RAPPER

On 19 June, an Istanbul court ordered the immediate release of rapper, Ezhel, after acquitting him of ‘publicly promoting the use of drugs’ on the basis of insufficient evidence of intent to engage in any unlawful behaviour.

Sercan İpekciöğlü, better known by his stage name **Ezhel**, was detained by police on 23 May after a second round of questioning over drug promotion allegations. Ezhel was remanded in prison on the same day and was being held in Maltepe Prison, in Istanbul. The court decision to remand Ezhel in prison contained no material evidence that he had actively promoted the use of drugs. On 19 June, an Istanbul court acquitted Ezhel of ‘promoting drugs’ and ordered his immediate release. The rapper was acquitted with the judge ruling that there was insufficient evidence that Ezhel had intentionally engaged in any unlawful activity.

Ezhel’s arrest and detention prompted supporters to launch a viral social media campaign, with thousands of users calling for his release using the hashtag #FreeEzhel, making this one of the top trending hashtags on Twitter in Turkey. The rapper’s acquittal represents a significantly positive development in a country where freedom of expression has been under increasing attack since the ongoing state of emergency, in place since July 2016.

Ezhel is a prominent figure on the Turkish rap scene and is known for his dark depictions of street life in urban Turkey. He was questioned over two songs which refer to the use of cannabis and a now deleted social media post displaying a photograph of the rapper holding a cannabis leaf.

Following the trial, Ezhel thanked Amnesty International and its supporters for playing a leading role in the campaign for his acquittal: “Together we stand. Thank you for your solidarity and efforts.”

Thank you to all those who sent appeals. No further action is requested from the UA network.

This is the first update of 107/18. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/8512/2018/en/

Name: Sercan İpekciöğlü (Ezhel)

Gender m/f: Male

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