

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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TURKEY: CRACKDOWN ON CIVIL SOCIETY CONTINUES WITH FULL FORCE DESPITE END OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY

Thirteen civil society actors, including professors Turgut Tarhanlı, Betül Tanbay and film producer Çiğdem Mater, were detained by police in early morning raids on 16 November 2018, in the latest attack on independent civil society in Turkey.

According to the authorities, the detentions are part of the investigation into civil society leader Osman Kavala who has been remanded in prison custody for over a year without indictment. According to a “media information note” shared with journalists by Istanbul Security Directorate, raids targeted 20 individuals in four cities across Turkey. According to the same note, detentions relate to alleged activities involving Osman Kavala around the overwhelmingly peaceful “Gezi Park” protests that took place across Turkey as a reaction to the violent police dispersal of a small group of protestors in Istanbul’s Gezi Park in May 2013. The 13 individuals currently in detention include civil society actors connected to Anadolu Kültür, a civil society organization founded by Osman Kavala, and the Open Society Institute, where he was a board member in Turkey.

The allegations against those detained include organizing meetings to “deepen and spread” the Gezi Park protests, inviting trainers and moderators on the subject of “civil disobedience and non-violent activism,” carrying out media activities to continue the “Gezi Park process” and activities to stop export of tear gas to Turkey, all of which, *even if true*, are legitimate activities protected under the rights to freedom of expression, association and the right to peaceful assembly.

At the time of the Gezi Park protests, Amnesty International itself campaigned to stop tear gas exports from South Korea to Turkey, having documented the widespread use of excessive force by police officers using tear gas and water cannon.

While 31 October 2018 marked Osman Kavala’s imprisonment in Turkey’s highest security prison without an indictment, these new detentions on the basis of absurd allegations show that the government is intent on continuing with its crackdown on independent civil society and shatter any illusion that Turkey is normalizing following the end to the state of emergency in July 2018.

During the two year-long state of emergency, which was announced following the violent coup attempt of 15 July 2016, more than 1,500 organizations and foundations have been closed down. Peaceful protest was and continues to be suppressed. Despite the end of the state of emergency, those who criticize the government continue to risk criminal charges and lengthy and punitive pre-trial imprisonment. More than 150 journalists remain in prison. Almost 130,000 public sector workers have been arbitrarily dismissed from their jobs for alleged “links to terrorist organizations” during the state of emergency that allowed the government to rule by executive decree, without effective parliamentary or judicial oversight.

According to the media information note issued by Istanbul Security Directorate, detainees include Anadolu Kültür staff, alongside prominent civil society actors, including Asena Günal, Ayşegül Güzel, Bora Sarı, Filiz Telek, Hakan Altınay, Hande Özhabeş, Meltem Aslan, Yiğit Ali Emekçi, Yiğit Aksakoğlu, Yusuf Cıvır, as well as Turgut Tarhanlı, a prominent human rights law professor, Betül Tanbay, professor of mathematics, and film producer, Çiğdem Mater.

Amnesty International calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Osman Kavala and civil society actors detained today in connection with the investigation against him, which is yet to produce any evidence of an internationally recognized crime.