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AI – Amnesty International

Turkey: Rights defenders tried for standing up for press freedom, must be acquitted

Ahead of the expected verdict in a case against two prominent human rights defenders and a writer accused of ‘making terrorist propaganda’ for participating in a solidarity campaign for a Kurdish daily newspaper, Amnesty International is calling for their acquittal.

Erol Önderoğlu (Reporters Without Borders representative in Turkey and International Press Institute member), Şebnem Korur Fincancı (Chair of Human Rights Foundation of Turkey) and writer Ahmet Nesin were detained in 2016 after symbolically guest editing a publication for a day as part of a solidarity campaign for the now shuttered *Özgür Gündem* newspaper.

They are charged with “making propaganda for a terrorist organisation”, “incitement to commit a crime” and “praising a crime and a criminal” and face up to 14-and-a-half years in jail.

“Because they stood up for press freedom by expressing solidarity for persecuted journalists, these human rights defenders have found themselves the subject of criminal proceedings that have dragged on for more than three years. They were simply defending the core principles of freedom of expression and the public’s right to receive information, human rights protected under both domestic and international law,” said Amnesty International’s Turkey Campaigner, Milena Buyum.

“From day one, the absurd charges levelled against them and scores of others who also took part in the solidarity campaign were clearly intended to silence them and to intimidate journalists, rights defenders and wider civil society in Turkey. The only just outcome is their acquittal of these baseless charges.”

BACKGROUND

In all, of the 56 people who took part in the solidarity campaign, 49 were subjected to criminal proceedings. Of those, 38 people were eventually prosecuted for their participation in the solidarity campaign for one day as symbolic editors of the *Özgür Gündem* newspaper. The campaign which took place between May and August 2016

aimed at highlighting the judicial harassment of the newspaper’s editors and writers. *Özgür Gündem* was closed by executive decree under the state of emergency in August 2016.

Of the 31 people whose trials have concluded, four were acquitted, with 27 receiving a total of over 24 years in prison and 67,000 TL (approximately 10,500 Euros) in fines. The sentences of two of the convicted guest editors, rights defender Murat Çelikkan and writer and journalist Ayşe Düzkan, were not suspended and they were imprisoned for two and five months respectively. They were then released on bail with judicial controls for the remainder of their sentences.

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ecoi.net summary:

2 human rights defenders and one writer accused of terrorist propaganda for participating in solidarity campaign with Kurdish newspaper



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