

URGENT ACTION

TURKEY MUST RELEASE CIVIL SOCIETY FIGURES

Osman Kavala, Yiğit Aksakoğlu and 14 other prominent civil society figures are facing life in prison after a court accepted an indictment against them on 4 March. They are wrongly accused of 'attempting to overthrow the government or prevent it from performing its duties' for their alleged role in 'directing' the Gezi Park protests of 2013. Osman Kavala has already been remanded in pre-trial detention for over 16 months and Yiğit Aksakoğlu for almost four months. The rest of the accused are currently free pending trial. The Turkish authorities must immediately and unconditionally release Osman Kavala and Yiğit Aksakoğlu and drop the trumped-up charges against all 16.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

*Minister of Justice of the Republic of Turkey
Mr Abdülhamit Gül
Adalet Bakanlığı
06659 Ankara, Turkey
Fax: +90 312 419 33 70
Email: info@adalet.gov.tr*

Dear Minister,

*I am deeply concerned about the 4 March decision of the Istanbul Heavy Penal Court No. 30 accepting the indictment against **Osman Kavala, Yiğit Aksakoğlu and 14 other prominent civil society figures**, accusing them of 'attempting to overthrow the government or prevent it from performing its duties' during the Gezi Park protests of 2013.*

These protests were peaceful in character and there is no credible evidence linking any of the individuals named in this indictment with acts of violence or public disorder. The indictment is filled with unsubstantiated accusations that attempt to rewrite the history of the Gezi Park protests and silence some of Turkey's most prominent civil society figures. If found guilty on these baseless charges, those accused could face life imprisonment without parole.

Osman Kavala has already been remanded in pre-trial detention for over 16 months and Yiğit Aksakoğlu for almost four months based on these spurious claims, an imprisonment that represents an arbitrary deprivation of their liberty. Acceptance of the indictment, given that it should mean the prosecution and the court both believe all relevant evidence has been collected to start the prosecution, further exposes the arbitrariness of Osman Kavala and Yiğit Aksakoğlu's continued incarceration.

I therefore urge you to do all in your power to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of Osman Kavala and Yiğit Aksakoğlu and that the charges against all 16 individuals are dropped.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Gezi Park protests started as an environmental protest against the redevelopment of Gezi Park in central Istanbul. They quickly spread across the country in response to the heavy-handed police crackdown of the protest in Istanbul and drew millions of people onto the streets to participate in an overwhelmingly peaceful mass expression of dissent. The indictment presents this protest movement as being the central element of a violent plot to overthrow the Turkish government. Spurious allegations are peppered throughout the indictment which attempt to tie the accused individuals to this alleged plot. Despite lack of any evidence presented in the indictment that ties the accused to any of the crimes listed in it, all the accused face life in prison without parole.

In addition to civil society leader Osman Kavala and Yiğit Aksakoğlu, an NGO professional working in early child development, those accused include renowned journalist Can Dündar, lawyer Can Atalay, architect Mücella Yapıcı and city planner Tayfun Kahraman, board member of Anadolu Kültür Hakan Altınay and its deputy chair Yiğit Ali Ekmekçi, film producer Çiğdem Mater as well as a number of individuals involved in writing, producing and acting in an interactive play, alleged by the authorities to be a rehearsal for the Gezi Park protests.

Osman Kavala was taken into police custody on 18 October 2017 at Istanbul Atatürk Airport upon arrival on a flight from Gaziantep, eastern Turkey. On 1 November 2017, a judge ordered that he be remanded in Turkey's maximum security Silivri Prison, where he has been detained since. On 16 November 2018, Yiğit Aksakoğlu was detained by police alongside 12 other civil society figures. While the others were all released, Yiğit Aksakoğlu was remanded in pre-trial detention on suspicion of 'attempting to overthrow the government' following a 17 November court order from the Istanbul Criminal Court of Peace No. 6. Only three of the individuals detained in November alongside Yiğit Aksakoğlu have been named in the 4 March indictment. The rest of the individuals in that group are currently free and have not been charged although an investigation against them continues. Yiğit Aksakoğlu remains in prison.

A review of Kavala and Aksakoğlu's ongoing detention will be held on 2 April. This will be the first time their lawyers will have the chance to appeal their detention based on the evidence and indictment levelled against them.

The right to freedom of peaceful assembly is enshrined in human rights treaties to which Turkey is a party, including the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR). The right to freedom of peaceful assembly is also protected by Turkey's Constitution. On 26 April 2015, an Istanbul court ruling confirmed that the Gezi Park protests were activities protected under the right to peaceful assembly by acquitting all 26 individuals prosecuted for their alleged role in the protests. Defendants included Mücella Yapıcı, then Secretary of Taksim Solidarity, a coalition of more than 100 organizations of architects, engineers, doctors, trade unionists and others established to oppose the redevelopment of Gezi Park. The court also acquitted her and four others of 'forming an organization with the aim of committing a crime' in the same case.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Turkish and English.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 1 April 2019.

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAMES AND PREFERRED PRONOUNS: Ali Hakan Altınay (he/him), Ayşe Mücella Yapıcı (she/her), Ayşe Pınar Alabora (she/her), Can Dündar (he/him), Çiğdem Mater Utku (she/her), Gökçe Yılmaz (she/her), Handan Meltem Arıkan (she/her), Hanzade Hikmet Germiyanoglu (she/her), İnanç Ekmekçi (she/her), Mehmet Ali Alabora (he/him), Mine Özerden (she/her), Osman Kavala (he/him), Şerafettin Can Atalay (he/him), Tayfun Kahraman (he/him), Yiğit Aksakoğlu (he/him), Yiğit Ali Ekmekçi (he/him).

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR Umit Yalcin, Embassy of the Republic of Turkey 43 Belgrave Square SW1X 8PA, 020 7393 0202, embassy.london@mfa.gov.tr Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE

Target's Twitter Handle:
@abdulhamitgul

Suggested hashtags:
#FreeOsmanKavala
#FreeYigitAksaskođlu
#FreeRightsDefenders