

URGENT ACTION

OPEN GALATASARAY SQUARE FOR PROTESTERS

On 14 March 2025, 45 individuals, including relatives of victims of enforced disappearances in Türkiye who had faced prosecution since 2021 under the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations (Law No. 2911), were acquitted of the charge of “attending illegal meetings and marches without weapons and not dispersing despite warnings.” The prosecution, widely regarded as baseless and unjust, targeted individuals detained in August 2018 while peacefully gathering in Galatasaray Square to mark the 700th week of their vigil. The court’s ruling follows two separate Constitutional Court decisions in 2022 and 2023, both of which found that the applicants’ rights to freedom of peaceful assembly had been violated. It is now time to fully reopen Galatasaray Square and allow the Saturday Mothers/People to resume their weekly peaceful vigils without unlawful interference.

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

*Minister of Interior
Ali Yerlikaya
T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı,
Bakanlıklar/ANKARA
Türkiye*

Email: ozelkalem@icisleri.gov.tr or diab@icisleri.gov.tr

Dear Minister,

*I am writing to call on you to intervene, without further delay, to fully open Galatasaray Square to **Saturday Mothers/People’s** weekly peaceful vigil. This long overdue decision would be in line with the two Constitutional Court rulings in 2022 and 2023 and the acquittals in March 2025 of 45 defendants who have been prosecuted under the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations since 2021.*

While the group has been able to return to Galatasaray Square since November 2023, the round the clock presence of metal barriers and armed police, and the arbitrary limit on the numbers of protesters to 10 people allowed to gather each Saturday, continue to represent an unlawful restriction to Saturday Mothers/People’s enjoyment of their right to peaceful assembly.

The positive duty of all states party to binding international human rights treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights is to ensure the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly of all without discrimination. In the case of Saturday Mothers/People and all those who wish to assemble peacefully, Galatasaray Square is a location of symbolic importance that has become synonymous with the group over the last 30 years.

I call on you to ensure the Saturday Mothers/People’s right to peaceful assembly, open up the Square and lift all the current restrictions immediately.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For the past 28 years, the Saturday Mothers/People have tirelessly sought truth and justice for their loved ones who forcibly disappeared in police custody in Türkiye during the 1980s and 1990s. Since May 1995, they have held peaceful weekly vigils in Galatasaray Square in central Istanbul, demanding accountability from the authorities. Despite repeated detentions, the group continued their gatherings until March 1999, when police repression forced them to pause. After a ten-year gap, with no progress on their demands, they resumed the vigils in January 2009.

Over the years, the Saturday Mothers/People have repeatedly faced police violence, detentions, and even prosecutions for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, rights that Turkish authorities have consistently failed to uphold.

On 25 August 2018, during their 700th weekly vigil, riot police used tear gas, water cannons, and excessive force to disperse hundreds of peaceful demonstrators, citing a ban by the Beyoğlu district governor. Forty-seven people were detained, and in 2021, 46 were indicted for “refusing to disperse despite warnings.” On 14 March 2025, 45 of them were acquitted; the case of one individual was separated due to procedural delays.

Following two Constitutional Court rulings in November 2022 and March 2023, both affirming that the group's right to peaceful assembly had been violated and that authorities must prevent future violations, the group resumed their vigils between April and November 2023. Despite this legal backing, they faced weekly detentions and police violence, sometimes amounting to torture or other ill-treatment.

In August 2023, another prosecution was launched against 20 individuals, including relatives of the disappeared and human rights defenders, who were detained during the 10 June vigil. They were acquitted in 2024.

On 8 November 2023, in response to a parliamentary question, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya acknowledged the group's victimization, stating, “We will find a solution as soon as possible.” That week, for the first time in months, no detentions occurred. Since then, a limited vigil with 10 relatives has been permitted near Galatasaray Square, a practice that continues.

The Saturday Mothers/People will mark the 30th anniversary of their struggle on 27 May 2025.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Turkish, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 24 November 2025

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Saturday Mothers/People (ALL)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR44/7419/2023/en/>

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

His Excellency Mr Osman Koray Ertay
Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary
Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye
43 Belgrave Square SW1X 8PA
020 7393 0202
Fax 020 7393 0066
embassy.london@mfa.gov.tr
london.emb.mfa.gov.tr
Salutation: Your Excellency