

## Lawyers' Day in Turkey Statement – 5 April 2024

Today, 5 April 2024, on the occasion of Lawyers' Day in Turkey, Lawyers for Lawyers once again strongly condemns the ongoing crackdown against lawyers in Turkey. The past twelve months were continuously marked by incidents of harassment and interference with lawyers' work.

Only two days ago, on 2 April 2024, 13 lawyers were arrested who were part of a group of 200 lawyers gathering at Çağlayan courthouse, Istanbul, to read a press statement protesting the earlier revocation of the mayor-elect's rights in the city of Van, Eastern Turkey. The lawyers were released the same night, but the arrests were a clear violation of Principle 23 of the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, which guarantees that lawyers are entitled to freedom of expression, association, and assembly. In particular, they have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights.

On 8 February 2024, lawyers Nazan Betül Vangölü Kozağaçlı, Didem Baydar Ünsal, Seda Şaraldı and Berrak Çağlar, all members of the ÇHD (Progressive Lawyers' Association), were arrested in the wake of an armed attack on Çağlayan Courthouse on 6 February, which left three killed (including the two assailants) and several police officers wounded. Two of the arrested lawyers are accused of participating in the attack, the other two of membership of a terrorist organization. The lawyers, while acknowledging that they have been representing the perpetrators in other cases, deny all accusations. According to their defense lawyers, there is no evidence in the case file at all. Three of the four lawyers remain in pre-trial detention. There are strong indications that this amounts to unacceptable identification of lawyers with their clients' cause, in violation of Principle 18 of the Basic Principles.

Another example is the case instigated against 25 lawyers, all members of ÖHD, in Diyarbakır. On 25 April 2023, they were arbitrarily arrested while polices raided their homes and offices. On 15 February 2024 the first hearing against one of these lawyers, Süleyman Şahin, took place. Lawyers for Lawyers [monitored](#) this hearing. In the upcoming months, more hearings will take place in the case against Mr. Şahin and other lawyers of this group. Lawyers for Lawyers believes that these lawyers are being prosecuted because of their legitimate professional activities and will follow these cases closely.

These incidents add to longstanding, ongoing issues that Lawyers for Lawyers has been monitoring, including:

- The cases against lawyers from ÖHD (Lawyers for Freedom) and EHB (Law Firm of the Oppressed), who are accused of membership of a terrorist organization, which have been ongoing since 2016 and 2017 respectively.
- The flagrant violation of the rights of the lawyers of Asrın Hukuk Bürosu to visit and communicate with their clients Abdullah Öcalan, Ömer Hayri Konar, Hamili Yıldırım, who have been detained on Imralı island for many years. They have not had any contact with or information about their clients since 2020, despite multiple efforts to have the courts change this. The families of the clients have no contact with them either.
- The case against the suspects of the murder of Tahir Elçi, the Diyarbakır based prominent human rights lawyer and president of the Diyarbakır Bar Association who was killed in November 2015, in which the authorities do not seriously investigate the facts and the court does not intervene. This yields a serious risk of impunity.

The examples above are emblematic of the systematic targeting of lawyers in Turkey for solely carrying out their professional activities. Many other lawyers have been subjected to judicial harassment, arrests, attacks, threats, surveillance, unfair trials and harsh sentences.

On this day, Lawyers for Lawyers restates its grave concern about the ongoing attacks on the legal profession in Turkey and the ensuing chilling effect. We urge the Turkish authorities to take their responsibility to uphold the rule of law and comply with the international human rights treaties Turkey is party to. We call upon the authorities to bring an end to the harassment and prosecution of lawyers, and unconditionally release all lawyers that are unduly detained for conducting their professional activities.