

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

Trade union judicial harassment is still present in Turkey

Brussels, 28 January 2014 (ITUC OnLine): In Turkey, judicial harassment of trade unions continues with six KESK members kept in prison pending trial. There are still 50 other KESK members indicted along with the six who remain in prison, and all were only exercising their legitimate trade union rights. The ITUC denounces the misuse of anti-terrorist laws and the false charges of membership in an illegal organisation.

56 KESK members were in court last week for alleged participation in the creation, management and activities of an illegal organisation. This case is the result of 19 February 2013 police raids (see ITUC Online: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/turkey-international-trade-union>) that were launched in 27 provinces in Turkey, searching for elements to prove a link with illegal organisations. As a result of these raids, more than 150 persons were arrested in different cities, and 70 were later kept in prison. Outside of Istanbul, most were released pending trials. In Istanbul, out of 56 put on trial, 29 had been kept in jail for 11 months. Yesterday, 23 of the 29 indicted KESK members kept in prison since February 2013 were released after a three-day hearing. The next hearing of the case will be held on the 6th of May.

The six kept in prison pending trial are three Egitim-Sen (teachers' union) members including two women; and three Tüm Bel Sen (All Municipal Employees' Trade Union) members including one woman. They are charged with managing the illegal organisation while the other 50 are only considered to be members of this organisation. However, the so-called evidence against the defendants reflects the activities of any citizen or trade union member participating in a demonstration, a meeting or even attending a concert. None of this constitutes terrorist activity in any way. As claimed during the hearing by all the defendants, the reason of their indictment was only their membership in a KESK- affiliated organisation and their fight against some governmental reforms such as the education one, the so-called 4+4+4.

This hearing was attended by an international delegation of trade unionists including the ITUC, the European Public Service Union (EPSU) and the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) amidst heavy police presence. Along with the KESK executive members and the international trade union delegation, the ITUC denounced these raids and the consecutive judicial proceedings as just another full-scale attack against Turkey's public sector union carried out by the authorities under the too-broad anti-terrorist law.

In a press conference held the day before the hearing, the members of the international delegation called for the immediate release of the KESK members still in prison and the dropping of all charges. They also demanded that the Government stop the persecution of trade union and civil society activists.

Since 2008, the President of KESK, Lami Ozgen, has been facing three cases under the anti-terrorism law, 22 cases under the law regarding demonstrations, two administrative investigations and two disciplinary investigations by the Minister of Education. All cases are still pending, and this aspect alone constitutes judicial harassment. Only in one case has the verdict been returned with a six-month prison sentence. It currently stands before the Supreme Court.

As of today, 22 KESK members including five women are kept in detention pending trial, some of them since 2009.; 12 of them including two women are from Egitim Sen, eight including one women are from Tüm Bel Sen, one woman is from SES (trade union for public employees in the health sector)

and one man is from BES (trade union for office employees). In addition, four KESK members are serving prison sentences.

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