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HTUR/FW

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### **Thirteen trade union leaders taken into custody**

Prime Minister,

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents over 175 million workers through its 311 affiliated organizations in 155 countries and territories, including Turkey, firmly protests against yet another blatant violation of trade union rights in your country. The list of recent and unconcealed large-scale infringements of workers' rights in Turkey is becoming particularly long, thereby ruling out any possible remaining presumption that your government is still serious about respecting these fundamental rights.

The ITUC was informed that on Monday 7 December, at seven o'clock in the morning, almost the entire Executive Committee as well as some local branch office Presidents of Nakliyat-Is, a trade union which organises transport workers (predominantly those employed by subcontractors) and which is affiliated to the ITUC-affiliated Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (DISK), were detained, and that the union headquarters were raided. In total, ten union officials are currently being kept in custody, including Nakliyat-Is President **Ali Rıza Küçükosmanoglu**, who is also a member of DISK's Executive Committee, and General Secretary **Aziz Cengiz**. The other detainees are **Rıza Balh**, **Abdullah Menek** and **Abuzer Aslan** (Nakliyat-Is Executive Committee members), **Nurettin Gümüş** (President of Nakliyat-Is' Istanbul branch office), **Erdal Kopal** (President of Nakliyat-Is' Gebze branch office), **Ali Özçelik** (President of Nakliyat-Is' Konya branch office), **Erkan Erçel**, **Cihangir Ceylan**, **Nurettin Akkuzu**, **Doğan Ulutaş** and **Hacı Altaş**.

Upon arresting them, the police searched their houses as well as union premises in the cities of Istanbul, Konya and Gebze. They are now being charged with "organising a crime syndicate in order to generate financial profit". As seems to be standard procedure by now in anti-union arrests in your country, the defense lawyers have as of yet no access to their clients' files.

Nakliyat-Is is one of the larger affiliates of the national union centre DISK, as well as a very visible workers' rights defender in Turkey, which has collective bargaining status and is known for having been successful on several occasions in standing up for the rights of the workers it represents. A number of complaints have been issued by employers during the past couple of years, of which most were withdrawn after a collective agreement was reached. According to our information, however, it is one company's management in particular, ie. Akgün Nakliyat, which pushed ahead its complaint. The prosecutor subsequently started tapping several union officials' phones in order to collect evidence, which is of course not a legitimate way of carrying out justice.

This adds up to an already very sad record of trade union rights violations in Turkey. Less than two weeks ago, we wrote to you to protest against the arbitrary arrest and detention of **Metin Findik**, Cizre-Sirnak representative of Tüm Bel-Sen, a municipal services' union which is affiliated to Public Service International (PSI). In the meantime, he spent over five months in detention without being informed of any charges against him.

The Nakliyat-Is case is also very reminiscent of the trial against 31 leaders and members of Turkish public sector union Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (KESK), which the ITUC attended together with over a dozen representatives from trade unions and Global Union Federations from eight different European countries, in Izmir on 19 and 20 November. Although they were released after the trial, 22 of them had already spent nearly six months in prison without access to due process, and they will all have to stand trial again in March. This trial also focused on the national union centre's largest affiliate, ie. the education trade union Eğitim-Sen, and the prosecutor had also and almost exclusively based his allegations on wiretapped telephone conversations. For more than two months, the defense lawyers had not had a chance to look into their clients' files.

On 9 October and 23 November, the ITUC firmly protested against the arrest and detention of **Murad Akincilar**, trade union secretary of the Swiss trade union UNIA, on trumped up terrorism charges. Murad Akincilar is still being detained under harsh conditions and held in isolation. He has also been facing health problems. He temporarily lost his sight in detention. He was then operated but did not manage to get full sight back in one eye.

On 19 October, the ITUC protested against the armed assault against DISK's union headquarters on 5 October. DISK President **Süleyman Celebi** was hit by four bullets in the leg and had to be taken to hospital and operated. After his assailant was arrested, Süleyman Celebi denied claims that he somehow owed him money. The ITUC therefore fears that this vicious attack was nothing less than attempted murder against a trade union leader.

Prime Minister, you lately have frequently been expressing regret at the slow pace at which Turkey's EU accession talks are proceeding. During your visit to Brussels in June this year, you specifically "urged France and Germany to embrace [Turkey's] drive to join the European Union" and vowed to "defy 'narrow-minded populists' trying to block [Turkey's] accession".

These claims sound void in light of the aforementioned violations of trade union rights. Turkey is bound by international treaties, including International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and the Right to Organise, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the European Convention on Human Rights, to ensure that workers' organisations can exercise their legitimate activities in a climate that is free of violence, reprisals or threats of any kind against their leaders and membership.

We urge you to undertake, without further delay, the necessary measures to meet the very serious concerns raised in this letter. We look forward to hearing from you in this respect.

Yours sincerely,

General Secretary

Cc: Mr Abdullah Gül, President of Turkey  
Mr Ömer Dinger, Minister of Labour and Social Security, Turkey  
Mr Sadullah Ergin, Ministry of Justice, Turkey  
Mission of Turkey to the EU, Brussels  
DISK, KESK, Türk-Is, HAK-Is  
Embassy of Turkey, Brussels  
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