

Abdurrahman Bilgiç
Ambassador
Turkish Embassy in London
43 Belgrave Square
London SW1X 8PA

19 June 2018

Dear Mr Bilgiç,

I am writing on behalf of the British Medical Association to request a meeting to discuss our concerns about the Turkish Government's treatment of the Turkish Medical Association (TTB) and the Turkish medical profession more widely.

Both the BMA, and the global medical profession, have been extremely disturbed at the response by President Erdoğan to statements issued by the TTB raising concerns about the public health impact of Turkish military incursion into Syria.

The TTB is an internationally respected medical association and an affiliate member of the World Medical Association. It is entirely appropriate for a medical association to speak out about concerns regarding the health consequences of armed conflict.

Immediately after issuing the statement, eleven of its senior doctors, including the Association's chairman, were arrested. More recently we have learnt the President is seeking to pass laws that would undermine the rights of professionals to form associations and to represent their colleagues. We believe it is vital that Turkey ensures, in all circumstances, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the international human rights standards and instruments that it has itself ratified.

I very much look forward to meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss these vital issues.

Yours sincerely



Dr John Chisholm CBE
Chair, BMA ethics committee

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

President of Turkey
Cumhurbaşkanlığı Külliyesi
06560 Beştepe-Ankara
Fax: (+90 312) 525 58 31
E-mail: contact@tccb.gov.tr

30 January 2018

Turkish Medical Association

Mr President Erdoğan

We are writing to you on behalf of the British Medical Association to express our grave concerns regarding the current campaign against the Turkish Medical Association (TMA). The strategy of arrest and intimidation further to its press release of 24 January 2018 stressing that war is a public health concern is a gross violation of international human rights norms, particularly rights to freedom of expression and opinion as stated in the [United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) of 1948 and in the the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that Turkey ratified in 2003, thereby consenting to be bound by its provisions.

It is entirely appropriate for a medical association to speak out concerning the health consequences of armed conflict. The BMA frequently speaks out in robust terms on these issues and will continue to do so. As senior members of the British Medical Association, speaking on behalf of the Association, its Council and the entire UK medical profession, we are appalled by the Government's arrest of the TMA's 11 Council members and condemn the arrest in the strongest possible terms.

We therefore urge you to:

- Release immediately the physicians' leaders of the Turkish Medical Association;
- Put an immediate end to all acts of harassment and intimidation, including at the judicial level, against the Turkish Medical Association;
- Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Turkey.



We trust that you will take promptly all the necessary actions in line with these core universal human rights and values.

Yours sincerely

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Dr John Chisholm CBE
Chair Medical Ethics Committee

Dr Andrew Dearden
Treasurer

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0PW

23 March 2018

Dear Secretary of State,

Re. Harassment and intimidation towards the Turkish Medical Association

We are writing to you on behalf of the BMA (British Medical Association) to express our grave concerns regarding the wholly inappropriate, and harmful, accusations levelled at the TTB (Turkish Medical Association), which included the recent detention, and subsequent release, of 11 TTB Council members by the Turkish Government.

In January 2018, the TTB issued a short statement¹ to raise concerns about the impact on public health of Turkey's military operation in the Kurdish-controlled region of northern Syria. We believe it is entirely appropriate for a medical association to speak out about concerns regarding the health consequences of armed conflict; it is something the BMA itself has done in the past in the interests of patients and health professionals.

In response to the Association's press release, in which the TTB stated "*No to war, peace immediately*", the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, publicly accused the TTB of being "*terrorist sympathisers*". Eleven of its senior doctors, including the Association's chairman, were later detained following an order from a Turkish prosecutor.

The BMA is appalled by this attack on the freedom of expression of medical personnel in Turkey, and wrote at the time to President Erdoğan to condemn the arrest in the strongest possible terms. Following international condemnation, these doctors were released. As we hope you will agree, their imprisonment was a gross violation of universal principles of medical ethics and international conventions – including fundamental norms that have been ratified by Turkey itself.²

The reaction of the international community and medical associations to this wholly unjustified situation has been a resounding call for an "*end [to] the campaign of intimidation*". The President of the World Medical Association further stated that "*The WMA has clear policy that physicians and national medical associations should alert governments to the human consequences of warfare. The Turkish Medical Association has a duty to support human rights and peace.*"

¹ Turkish Medical Association press release, 'War is a public health problem!', 24 Jan 2018:

http://ttb.org.tr/haber_goster.php?Guid=28de85da-00e5-11e8-a05f-429c499923e4

² For example, Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – an agreement which Turkey itself ratified in 2003.



We have been further distressed to read reports that the Turkish Health Minister, Ahmet Demircan, has said that the health ministry filed a lawsuit against the TTB. He is quoted as saying that the TTB “*had no right*” to issue their statement in January, and that the doctors would face judicial proceedings to be dismissed from their jobs.

Most recently, we have learnt that President Erdoğan is seeking to pass sweeping laws that will dismantle all independent national associations in Turkey, prohibit independent associations from using the word ‘Turkey’ or ‘Turkish’ in their titles, and remove obligations for any professional to be a member of a relevant professional association. This seems a direct attack on freedom of assembly and association, and on the rights of professionals to organise and to represent their colleagues.

In light of these grave developments in Turkey, which we believe are a serious affront to freedom of expression by doctors, or indeed any other member of society, we write to you, as Foreign Secretary. We urge you to raise this issue on the international stage as a matter of urgency, to make it clear that such action as we have seen is unacceptable. It is vital that the international community demands that Turkey ensures, in all circumstances, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and instruments that it has itself ratified.

We believe doctors and their fellow professionals must have the freedom to voice threats to public health without fear of retribution – in whichever country they live. They should be free to pursue both their own professional interests and the broader public good without fear of sparking a campaign of intimidation against themselves and others. We hope that, in collaboration with the UK’s international partners, we can achieve an immediate end to all such acts of harassment and intimidation against the Turkish Medical Association.

We trust that you will treat this matter seriously. If you would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact Holly Weldin, senior public affairs officer, in the first instance (via hweldin@bma.org.uk) who would be pleased to provide further assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Dr John Chisholm CBE
Chair, BMA Medical Ethics Committee



Dr Terry John
Chair, BMA International Committee

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

President of Turkey
Cumhurbaşkanlığı Külliyesi
06560 Beştepe-Ankara
Fax: (+90 312) 525 58 31
E-mail: contact@tccb.gov.tr

6 March 2019

Persecution of the medical profession

Mr President Erdoğan

I am writing to you on behalf of the British Medical Association to express our grave concerns about the continuing campaign against members of the medical profession in Turkey, including members of the Turkish Medical Association. (TTB)

The BMA is appalled by the Turkish Government's prosecution of Dr. Gençay Gürsoy, founder and former president of the TTB; Dr. Ozdemir Aktan, former president of the TTB; and Dr. Şebnem Korur Fincancı, a world-renowned forensic medical expert and president of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, all of whom, according to the Standing Committee for Doctors in Europe, have been prosecuted for charges related to their involvement in a peace petition in 2016.

The prosecution and detention of physicians for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression is a gross violation of the human rights enshrined by the [United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was ratified by Turkey in 2003.

We urge you to reconsider the sentencing of these physicians and put an immediate end to all acts of intimidation of physicians in Turkey. Further we urge you to ensure that the human rights and fundamental freedoms of physicians in Turkey are upheld in all circumstances in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Turkey.



We trust that you will take promptly all the necessary actions in line with these core universal human rights and values.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Chisholm". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a horizontal line underneath the name.

Dr John Chisholm CBE
Chair Medical Ethics Committee

The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

7 March 2019

Dear Secretary of State

Re. Persecution of Turkish physicians

We are writing to you on behalf of the BMA (British Medical Association) to reiterate our grave concerns about the Turkish Government's continued assaults on civil society, in particular the persecution of physicians who have validly raised concerns about the impacts of violent conflict in Turkey.

On 23 March 2018, we wrote to the then Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, to express the BMA's concerns about the arrest of eleven senior doctor members of the TTB (Turkish Medical Association). The doctors were detained in response to a statement made by the TTB which raised concerns about the public health impacts of violent conflict. Following international condemnation, including by the British Medical Association, the doctors were released on probation.

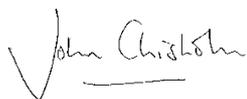
In December 2018, PHR (Physicians for Human Rights) and the CPME (Standing Committee of European Doctors) reported that a further three physicians have been detained, prosecuted, and sentenced in relation to their involvement in a peace petition which condemned the violent tactics used by the Turkish security forces in the southeast of Turkey in 2016. These doctors are Dr Gençay Gürsoy, founder and former president of the TTB, Dr Özdemir Aktan, former president of the TTB, and Dr Şebnem Korur Fincancı, a world-renowned forensic medical expert and president of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey.

The arrest and intimidation of doctors who have raised concerns about the impacts of violent conflict is a gross violation of international human rights norms, particularly rights to freedom of expression and opinion as protected by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was ratified by Turkey in 2003.



Doctors provide an essential service and must be allowed to exercise their right to work without interference. We urge you to take up these issues with Turkish authorities as a matter of urgency to ensure that the human rights and fundamental freedoms of physicians in Turkey are respected.

Yours sincerely,



Dr John Chisholm CBE
Chair, BMA medical ethics committee



Dr Terry John
Chair, BMA international committee

Ümit Yalçın

Ambassador
Republic of Turkey, Turkish Embassy in London
43 Belgrave Square
London SW1X 8PA

6 March 2019

Persecution of the medical profession

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you on behalf of the British Medical Association to express our grave concerns about the continuing campaign against members of the medical profession in Turkey, including members of the Turkish Medical Association (TTB).

The BMA is appalled by the Turkish Government's prosecution of Dr. Gençay Gürsoy, founder and former president of the TTB; Dr. Ozdemir Aktan, former president of the TTB; and Dr. Şebnem Korur Fincancı, a world-renowned forensic medical expert and president of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, who, according to the Standing Committee for Doctors in Europe, have been prosecuted for charges related to their involvement in a peace petition in 2016.

The prosecution and detention of physicians for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression is a gross violation of the human rights enshrined by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was ratified by Turkey 2003.

We urge you to reconsider the sentencing of these physicians and put an immediate end to all acts of intimidation of physicians in Turkey. Further we urge you to ensure that the human rights and fundamental freedoms of physicians in Turkey are upheld in all circumstances in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Turkey.

We trust that you will take promptly all the necessary actions in line with these core universal human rights and values.



Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Chisholm". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a horizontal line underneath the name.

Dr John Chisholm CBE
Chair, BMA ethics committee

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP

Foreign Secretary

Sent by email to: private.officegsi@fco.gov.uk

28 May 2019

Dear Foreign Secretary,

We are writing to you with regard to two matters of concern: first, the Turkish Government's treatment of physicians, including members of the TTB (Turkish Medical Association), and secondly, the Turkish authorities' inadequate provision of health services to prisoners. We request that you raise these matters with the Turkish Government and its representatives.

We have been extremely concerned by the sentencing of TTB members on 3 May, at a criminal court in Ankara. The BMA abhors the continued acts of intimidation towards physicians in Turkey and is in firm agreement with the WMA (World Medical Association) that the international community must demand Turkey upholds, in all circumstances, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and instruments that it has itself ratified.

The sentencing of physicians and health care workers, including 11 former executive board members of the TTB, who supported a petition raising concerns about the public health impacts of the Turkish military incursion into Syria, is a gross violation of their rights to freedom of expression and opinion. Prosecuting and detaining physicians in this way breaches the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948. In accordance with our previous correspondence to you on this matter, we hope you will urge the Turkish Government to put an immediate end to such violations.

Secondly, we have been concerned by reports that Turkish authorities are failing to provide up to 3,000 prisoners who have begun hunger strikes with adequate access to qualified health professionals and necessary treatment. According to the WMA, the current conditions in Turkish prisons do not allow adequate follow-up by physicians of prisoners on hunger strikes, which has led to severe health problems.

Withholding or obstructing access to healthcare and treatment contravenes both medical ethics and international law, particularly the right to health as enshrined both in Article 12 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ratified by Turkey on 23 September 2003) and in Article 25 of the *UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

We trust that you will take the necessary actions to highlight these two concerns with relevant counterparts in Turkey, in line with the UK's shared responsibility to promote core universal human rights and values.

Yours sincerely,



Dr John Chisholm CBE
Chair, BMA Medical Ethics Committee



Dr Terry John
Chair, BMA International Committee



Ümit Yalçın

Ambassador
Republic of Turkey, Turkish Embassy in London
43 Belgrave Square
London SW1X 8PA

28 May 2019

Persecution of the medical profession and prisoners' access to healthcare

Your Excellency,

We are writing to you on behalf of the British Medical Association to express our grave concerns about the continued persecution of physicians in Turkey and reports that prisoners in Turkish prisons do not have adequate access to health care.

Again, we urge the Turkish Government to put an immediate end to all acts of intimidation of physicians in Turkey and to reconsider the sentencing of physicians and health care workers, including 11 former executive board members of the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), who have been convicted on charges related to terrorism for supporting a petition which raised concerns about the public health impacts of the Turkish military incursion into Syria.

The prosecution and detention of physicians for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression are a gross violation of human rights, particularly rights to freedom of expression and opinion as protected by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

The TTB is an internationally respected medical association and an affiliate member of the World Medical Association. It is entirely appropriate for a medical association to speak out about concerns regarding the health consequences of armed conflict.

We are also concerned by recent reports that Turkish authorities are failing to provide up to 3000 prisoners who have begun hunger strikes with adequate access to qualified health professionals and necessary treatment.



According to the World Medical Association, the current conditions in Turkish prisons do not allow adequate follow-up by physicians of prisoners on hunger strikes, which have led to severe health problems such as gastrointestinal bleeding or hypersensitivity reaction.

Withholding or obstructing access to healthcare and treatment contravenes both medical ethics and international law, particularly the right to health, enshrined in Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified by Turkey on 23 September 2003), and Article 25 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We trust that you will ensure all the necessary actions are taken promptly, in line with these core universal human rights and values.

Yours sincerely

Dr John Chisholm CBE

Chair, BMA Medical Ethics Committee

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Dr Terry John

Chair, BMA International Committee

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