

Mr Fahrettin Koca
Minister of Health of the Republic of Turkey
Bilkent Yerleşkesi, Üniversiteler Mah. Dumlupınar Bulvarı 6001. Cad. No:9
Bilkent Çankaya, Ankara, Turkey

26 November 2020
Copenhagen, Denmark

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you in relation to the arrest of our colleague Dr Şeyhmus Gökalp. Dr Gökalp is a volunteer medical doctor with the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT) and member of the High Disciplinary Committee and a former member of the Executive Board of the Turkish Medical Association.

Police detained Dr Gökalp on 20 November 2020 and formally arrested him on 23 November. Dr Gökalp is accused of attending a meeting considered illegal by public authorities despite there being no evidence linking his presence to the meeting. The IRCT is deeply concerned that the arrest and charges brought against Dr Gökalp are an attempt to silence him for simply discharging his professional and ethical duties to provide healthcare and defend human rights. He is also accused of providing healthcare for members of a terrorist organization in a hospital, even though Dr. Gökalp was not present and did not work at the hospital at the time of the allegation.

His arrest takes place in a bigger context of increased repression against health professionals in Turkey and more recently against those who speak out against the government's handling of the Coronavirus response. In 2018, the former president of the Turkish Medical Association, Dr Gençay Gürsoy, and the president of HRFT, Dr Şebnem Korur Fincancı, were each sentenced to more than two years in prison for signing an anti-war declaration. In May 2019, 11 doctors were sentenced to 20 months in prison for speaking out against war. In November of this year, Dr Serdar Küni, a medical doctor with HRFT, was sentenced to four years and two months in prison for providing healthcare during a time of open-ended curfews in the southeast of the country.

We call on the Turkish government to:

1. Guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of Dr Şeyhmus Gökalp.
2. Immediately release him from custody and drop all charges against him.
3. Put an end to reprisals against health professionals and human rights defenders in Turkey.

We also take this opportunity to remind the Turkish government that by providing medical and psychosocial support, health professionals play an invaluable role in overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic as well as promoting healing, justice and freedom for its citizens.

Yours sincerely,



Asger Kjaerum

Director of Advocacy

International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)