



International human rights groups call for release of leading Turkish human rights defender and physician

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Turkish authorities have an opportunity tomorrow to release from custody one of its most internationally respected human rights defenders, Prof. [Dr. Şebnem Korur Fincancı](#), who has been [unlawfully detained](#) since 26 October 2022. It is her second unlawful detention in six years in retaliation for her renowned medical and rights work.

Today [Amnesty International](#), [DIGNITY](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), the [International Rehabilitation Council for Victims of Torture](#), [Physicians for Human Rights \(PHR\)](#), [REDRESS](#) and the [World Medical Association](#) call on the Turkish authorities to release Prof. Dr. Korur Fincancı, the president of the Turkish Medical Association's Central Committee, member of the Executive Board of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, member of the International Forensic Experts Group at IRCT, and Advisory Council member at PHR. Korur Fincancı, who has exhumed mass graves in Bosnia for the U.N. and conducted other high-profile forensic investigations in Turkey and abroad, is one of the country's foremost forensic physicians and a longtime partner to leading medical and human rights organizations.

“At tomorrow's hearing the Turkish court can right an outrageous wrong, not only for Şebnem Korur Fincancı but for human rights advocates everywhere,” said Erika Dailey, director of advocacy and policy for PHR. “Korur Fincancı, an acclaimed forensic physician, has dedicated much of her life to fighting torture and ill-treatment in Türkiye and around the world. We now call for a fair hearing that leads to dropping these spurious charges and her immediate and unconditional release.”

The hearing, which will take place at 09.30 (CET+2) on 23 December before the İstanbul 24th Heavy Penal Court, will be attended by international trial monitors, including from the International Rehabilitation Council for Victims of Torture, PHR, and others. The prior press conference, organized by the Turkish Medical Association and the Human Rights Foundation of Türkiye on 22 December, will be livestreamed on YouTube.

Korur Fincancı is a distinguished expert on the documentation of torture. She collaborated with IRCT, PHR and others in creating the [Istanbul Protocol](#), the international standard for forensic investigations of torture and other forms of ill-treatment. She was awarded the Hrant Dink Prize in 2014, [Physicians for Human Rights Award in 2017](#), and the Hessian Peace Prize in 2018. Leading anti-torture campaigners spoke out on Dr. Fincancı's arbitrary arrest in [The Lancet](#) in November.

Following her detention, the Ankara civil court lodged a complaint against the Turkish Medical Association. “Dr. Korur Fincancı is one of the Turkish physicians who has been persecuted in recent years merely for speaking out for the protection of health and human rights,” said Dr. Michele Heisler, PHR's Medical Director. “Part of the Turkish government's crackdown aims to strip the independent Turkish Medical Association, which represents about 60 percent of the country's physicians, of its autonomous leadership through legislative sleight of hand. Health professionals everywhere should rally to the aid of their besieged colleagues in Türkiye.”

A separate civil lawsuit has been initiated in Ankara under the Law on the Turkish Medical Association (No. 6023) seeking to remove the elected leadership of the Turkish Medical Association and its local branches.

In June 2016, Korur Fincancı and two co-defendants were [arrested, briefly imprisoned, and charged](#) with disseminating “terrorist propaganda” after taking part in a solidarity campaign with a newspaper critical of the government of Türkiye. She was acquitted in July 2019, but her acquittal was overturned on appeal in November 2020 and her re-trial is ongoing.

“Şebnem Korur Fincancı’s arbitrary detention is part of a deliberate strategy put in place by the government to discredit her long-standing work in investigating grave human rights violations as a forensic expert and a human rights defender in Türkiye and around the world. The authorities’ reaction and her arrest constitute a blatant violation of her freedom of expression and testify once more of the ongoing crackdown on human rights in the country,” said Lisa Henry, Secretary General at IRCT.

Prof. Frank Ulrich Montgomery, Chair of Council of the World Medical Association, said, “Her work should be lauded, not punished.”

Amnesty International, DIGNITY, Human Rights Watch, IRCT, PHR, REDRESS and the World Medical Association reiterate their calls for all charges against Şebnem Korur Fincancı to be dropped and for an end to the unjust targeting of physicians and dissenters in Türkiye.

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