

16 November 2018

Turkey: Police operation against civil society and academics

On 16 November 2018, around 6 AM, 13 human rights defenders including academics and prominent civil society actors were taken into custody in simultaneous police operations in İstanbul, Adana, Antalya and Muğla. According to the police department, 13 human rights defenders were taken into custody “for their activities in a hierarchical structure led by Osman Kavala”, a prominent philanthropist who has been in pre-trial detention over a year. The detained human rights defenders include civil society actors affiliated with *Anadolu Kültür*, a civil society organisations led by Osman Kavala. The arrest warrant was initially issued against 20 people while 13 has been taken into custody so far.

Detained human rights defenders are **Prof. Dr. Betül Tanbay**, faculty member of the Department of Mathematics at Boğaziçi University, member of Academics for Peace and Deputy Chair of the European Mathematical Society; **Prof. Dr. Turgut Tarhanlı**, Dean of the Faculty of Law of İstanbul Bilgi University and Professor of Human Rights Law; **Yiğit Ali Ekmekçi**, Deputy Chair of Anadolu Kültür Executive Board; **Ali Hakan Altınay**, Anadolu Kültür Executive Board member; **Asena Günal**, General Coordinator of Anadolu Kültür İstanbul Office; **Meltem Aslan**, former Director General of Anadolu Kültür and Co-Director of Truth Justice Memory Center; **Çiğdem Mater**, film producer and consultant at Anadolu Kültür; **Yiğit Aksakoğlu**, former staff member of İstanbul Bilgi University’s NGO Research and Training Unit; **Hande Özhabes**, former staff member of Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, **Bora Sarı**, **Ayşegül Güzel**, **Filiz Telek** and **Yusuf Cıvrı**.

In the early morning of 16 November 2018, police carried out simultaneous raids at various addresses in İstanbul, Adana, Antalya and Muğla. So far, 13 human rights defenders, including academics and prominent civil society actors, have been taken into custody while the arrest warrant was issued against 20 people. The human rights defenders have been held at Vatan Police Department to be questioned by the prosecutor. Çiğdem Mater is the only one who has been held in Kaş Police Department and will be transferred to İstanbul later on 16 November. Following their questioning, they may be released or referred to the court after the weekend.

According to the information note issued by the police department, the human rights defenders were detained as part of an investigation into prominent philanthropist Osman Kavala and the civil society organisations affiliated with him, namely *Anadolu Kültür* and *Açık Toplum Vakfı* (Open Society Institute). He was accused of “attempting to overthrow the government by force” by supporting the Gezi Park Protests in 2013 and spreading chaos and disorder at the national level. In the information note, it was alleged that the human rights defenders, in coordination with Osman Kavala, had organised meetings to promote and generalise the Gezi Park Protests, brought professional protestors, trainers and facilitators from abroad to focus on issues like civil disobedience and peaceful protesting in order to keep the Gezi Park Protests ongoing, participated in the creation of new media sources in order to influence the public opinion about the existing and future protests, and met with Western organisations and individuals to ban the sale of tear gas to Turkey.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern at the detention of 13 human rights defenders and the ongoing criminal investigation against them as it believes that they are solely linked to their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the Turkish authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release all 13 detained human rights defenders and drop the investigation against them as it is believed that they are solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Turkey are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

