

29 January 2019

Turkey: Judicial harassment of academic **Bülent Şık**

The first hearing of academic and human rights defender **Bülent Şık** will be held on 7 February 2019 at Istanbul's 2nd Criminal Court of First Instance in Çağlayan Courthouse. He is charged with “disclosing work secrets” and “providing and disclosing forbidden information” in relation to a series of articles he published, which reported on the findings of Ministry of Health-led research about environmental pollution that was endangering public health. He faces a prison sentence of between five to twelve years.

[Bülent Şık](#) is a human rights defender working on public health, food safety and the right to a healthy environment. He previously conducted research on areas such as toxic chemicals in food and drinking water and their impact on public health. He was an academic and Technical Assistant Director of the Food Safety and Agricultural Research Center at Akdeniz University. He was also a signatory to the 2016 Academics for Peace petition “We will not be party to this crime”, which called for peace in South Eastern Turkey. He was dismissed from his position by emergency decree in November 2016. He is also facing charges of “terrorist propaganda” for signing the peace petition and his trial continues at Istanbul's 22nd High Criminal Court.

Between 2011 and 2016, the Ministry of Health carried out research in the provinces of Kocaeli, Kırklareli, Edirne, Tekirdağ and Antalya on the contamination of soil, food, air and water by carcinogenic chemicals and their potential risks to human health. Bülent Şık was one of the researchers contracted by the Ministry. In 2016, the human rights defender was forced to resign from the project after he signed the petition of Academics for Peace.

Given the ongoing threat to public health due to the lack of remedial measures and that information about the threat was still not in the public domain, Bülent Şık decided to publish the research in 2018. Between 16 and 19 April 2018, Bülent Şık published four articles in the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* on his findings.

Upon complaint of the Ministry of Health, a criminal investigation was opened against Bülent Şık and an indictment was subsequently issued. Although the indictment was first issued by the Prosecutor's Office for Press-related Crimes, the investigation was later referred to the Prosecutor's Office for Terrorism-related Crimes, and the indictment issued by that office was accepted by the court. The human rights defender is charged with “disclosing work secrets” and “providing and disclosing forbidden information.” His first hearing will be held at 10.45am on 7 February 2019.

More recently, a second criminal investigation was opened against Bülent Şık to determine whether his social media posts constituted “terrorist propaganda”. He was summoned to the Prosecutor's Office on 5 January 2019 for questioning about four articles he published in the online newspaper *Bianet* between 2015 and 2018, on the impact of armed conflict on environmental and public health in Turkey and the Middle East. He was also asked about having shared, on his social media account, the press release “War is a Public Health Problem” issued by the Turkish Medical Association calling for peace in South Eastern Turkey. The prosecutor is expected to make a decision on the outcome of the investigation against Bülent Şık in the coming weeks.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern on the judicial harassment of Bülent Şık as it is believed that the charges are solely related to his peaceful and legitimate activities in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Turkey to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally drop all charges and investigations against Bülent Şık;
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.