

30 November 2018

Turkey: Judicial harassment of trade unionists and construction workers

The first hearing of 31 detained construction workers and trade unionists, including **Özgür Karabulut**, will be held on 5 December 2018 before Gaziosmanpaşa's Criminal Court of First Instance. They were arrested following a peaceful protest organised by thousands of construction workers to demand improvement of the poor working and living conditions on the construction site of Istanbul's third airport. They are facing charges of "disrupting the freedom to work", "damaging public property", "resisting police" and "possessing weapons during public assemblies and demonstrations".

[Özgür Karabulut](#) is a trade unionist and human rights defenders focusing on labour rights. He is the head of **Dev Yapı-İş** (the Progressive Construction Workers Union), representing a group of workers in the construction site of Istanbul's third airport, and also a board member of **Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu** (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey).

On 14 September 2018, approximately 10 000 construction workers ceased operations and gathered to protest the precarious working and living conditions on the construction site of Istanbul's third airport. Their demands included the improvement of shuttle services, payment of overdue wages, improved workplace safety to prevent fatal accidents and a solution to the bed bug problem in dormitories. On the night of the protest, the gendarmerie raided the dormitories of the workers and detained 401 workers. While the majority of the detained workers were released in the following days, 28 workers and trade unionists were arrested.

Over the next days, six more workers/trade unionist were detained, including Özgür Karabulut. He was arrested on 5 October 2018 because of a speech he delivered during the protests allegedly encouraging the workers to continue demonstrating and slow down the work. A criminal investigation was opened against 61 workers and trade unionists, 31 of which are in detention. All of them are charged with "disrupting the freedom to work", "damaging public property", "resisting police" and "possessing weapons during public assemblies and demonstrations". Özgür Karabulut is being held in Silivri Prison, alongside many other high profile human rights defenders such as [Selçuk Kozağaçlı](#). The first hearing will be held on 5 December 2018 before Gaziosmanpaşa's Criminal Court of First Instance.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern at the judicial harassment of workers and trade unionists, including Özgür Karabulut, as it believes it is solely linked to the legitimate and peaceful activities in defence of labour rights as well as human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Turkey to:

1. Immediately release the detained workers and trade unionists, including Özgür Karabulut, and drop the charges against them,
2. Ensure that the rights to freedom of assembly and association of workers and trade unionists are respected,
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Turkey, including labour rights defenders, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.