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Turkey: Lawyer and academic Hanifi Barış arrested for social media posts

On 4 July 2018, lawyer and academic **Hanifi Barış** was arrested for posts he made on social media. During his interrogation, he was accused of creating “terrorist propaganda” by sharing news articles, despite the fact that he had not added any of his own commentary. His lawyer appealed the decision and requested his release, however his appeal was denied, first by the 10th Criminal Judgeship of Peace on 10 July and then by the 11th Criminal Judgeship of Peace on 12 July.

Hanifi Barış is a lawyer and academic, who has also worked on human rights. He is a member of Academics for Peace and signed the 2016 peace petition “We will not be a party to this crime!”. The human rights defender drew public attention for representing a famous conscientious objector who was sentenced to prison. He also defended his client's right to represent himself in Kurdish, which was refused by the court. Hanifi Barış was practising law as a private attorney in Turkey prior to his arrest.

On 4 July, Hanifi Barış received a call from police, inviting him to the police station to give a statement on his social media posts. After going to the police station, he was referred to the Prosecutor's Office, and then to the court upon the Prosecutor's request for his arrest. Hanifi Barış was arrested on the same day by the 10th Criminal Judgeship of Peace. Although he went to the police station voluntarily, the judge stated in the decision that he was arrested as it was suspected that he may abscond. Hanifi Barış was first brought to Metris Prison and then to Silivri Closed Prison No. 5. His lawyer appealed the decision and requested his release, however his appeal was denied, first by the 10th Criminal Judgeship of Peace on 10 July and then by the 11th Criminal Judgeship of Peace on 12 July.

During his interrogation at the Prosecutor's Office, Hanifi Barış was accused of creating “terrorist propaganda” and questioned about his social media posts which shared news articles and commentaries from international and local media sources. The human rights defender did not add any of his own commentary on the posts. Without referring to the actual content of the posts, the accusations against him were based on the article's titles, and photos that appeared on the covers.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern regarding the arrest of and accusations against Hanifi Barış, which have been justified on the sole basis of his social media posts in the absence of any concrete evidence against him.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Turkey to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Hanifi Barış and drop all charges against him, as it is believed that he is being held solely as a result of exercising his fundamental rights to freedom of expression guaranteed under domestic and international law;
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.