

9 June 2017

Turkey: Murat Çelikkan convicted under false charges

On 6 June 2017, **Murat Çelikkan**'s attorney filed a plea before the Court of Appeal of Turkey against the decision to incarcerate the human rights defender for eighteen months issued by the Istanbul 13th Heavy Penal Court on 16 May 2017.

[Murat Çelikkan](#) is a human rights defender and journalist who was one of the founders of several prominent human rights organisations in Turkey, including **Human Rights Association**, **Amnesty International Turkey**, and **Citizens Assembly**. Murat Çelikkan is currently the Co-Director of **Hafıza Merkezi** (Truth Justice Memory Center), an organisation that strives to bring to light impunity, past violations of human rights - especially cases of harassment against Kurds and Armenians - and support victims in obtaining justice. He also focuses on human rights education, the prevention of torture and the protection and promotion of the rights to freedom of assembly, expression, and the media, as well as refugee rights and peace building in relation to the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. He is a recent alumnus of the Columbia University Institute for the Study of Human Rights Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability Program.

On 16 May 2017, the Istanbul 13th Heavy Penal Court sentenced Murat Çelikkan to eighteen months' imprisonment on false charges of involvement in terrorist propaganda under the Anti-Terror Law Article 7/2. Prior to that, on 13 June 2016, Murat Çelikkan was questioned by the prosecutor for his participation in the *Editor-in-Chief on Watch* Campaign launched on 3 May 2016 in protest against crackdowns on the pro-Kurdish daily *Özgür Gündem* (Turkish for "Free Agenda").

Özgür Gündem is a daily newspaper covering news from the Kurdish region, including systematic violations of human rights there. It was one of the many media outlets shut down during Turkey's state of emergency following the coup attempt. The editors of the daily are currently facing criminal prosecution.

The campaign was run for three months by 56 journalists, writers, activists, and actors who, in solidarity with *Özgür Gündem* and on a daily rotating basis, acted as its Editor-in-Chief. Of the 56 campaigners, 50 were investigated and 38 prosecuted. Murat Çelikkan is among the 18 activists who were sentenced for the same charges. The sentences of all 18 activists have been deferred, except for that of Murat Çelikkan. The defender's lawyer reported that this was due to the fact that Murat Çelikkan was considered not to have shown enough remorse during the trials.

If the decision of the Istanbul 13th Heavy Penal Court is not reversed, Murat Çelikkan will face jail time. During the first hearings in relation to the case of the *Editor-in-Chief on Watch* Campaign, three of the attendees - the President of the **Human Rights Foundation**, [Şebnem Korur Fincancı](#), the RSF Turkey representative journalist, [Erol Önderoğlu](#), and the writer, [Ahmet Nesin](#), were detained for 10 days.

Front Line Defenders condemns the conviction and sentencing of Murat Çelikkan, as it believes they are motivated by his peaceful and legitimate defence of human rights in Turkey.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Turkey to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against **Murat Çelikkan** and quash his conviction;
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, including judicial harassment.