



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
Internacional de la Educación
Bildungsinternationale

**TO ALL EI MEMBER ORGANISATIONS
TO THE ITUC
TO THE ILO**

Brussels, 2 July 2009

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URGENT ACTION APPEAL – TURKEY

Arrest and detention of trade union leaders and activists

Dear colleagues,

In recent weeks, EI member organisation Egitim-Sen and the Confederation of Public Employees' Unions (KESK) – to which EI's member is affiliated – have suffered a series of attacks by the Turkish authorities, including the occupation and searches of the trade union premises by the security forces, arrest and preventive detention of trade union leaders and the use of excessive violence by the police against teachers demonstrating peacefully.

There are currently 22 Egitim-Sen and KESK officials in detention, including the Women Secretaries of both organisations (see list in annex).

EI and its member organisation in Turkey request your support to urge the Turkish authorities to release immediately the imprisoned trade unionists, to respect the fundamental trade union rights of workers' organisations Egitim-Sen and KESK, and to stop impeding their trade union activities.

What has happened

The recent wave of arrest and detention of Egitim Sen and KESK leaders and activists started on Thursday 28 May 2009 when the Turkish police launched operations in the KESK headquarters in Ankara and in the KESK local branch offices in Izmir, Istanbul, Van and Manisa. More than 30 KESK and Egitim-Sen members were arrested, including members of administrative boards of Egitim-Sen local branches, a member of the Egitim-Sen executive board, and both Women Secretaries of Egitim-Sen and KESK, Gulcin Isbert and Songul Morsümbül. Documents and computers were seized by the police.

Arrested trade unionists were transferred to the Izmir local court for investigation. According to the Turkish press, the operation was "set up in the framework of a bigger operation aimed at cracking down on the terrorist organisation PKK".

Six unionists were released the same day after having their statements taken by the police. Others were released on the following days. However, 14 union officials have remained in custody.

On 5 June, marching columns of Egitim-Sen members who had departed from all over Turkey reached Ankara to demand collective bargaining rights for public servants. Intending to march to the building of Ministry of National Education, the trade unionists were assaulted by the riot police, who employed tear gas. Some teachers, including at least one member of Egitim-Sen's National Executive Board, were beaten and wounded, and taken to hospital. At least one teacher required surgery.

On 16 June, eight of the leaders and members of KESK and Egitim-Sen who had been released were arrested again. The Women Secretaries of Egitim-Sen and KESK were among them. The updated list of the 22 trade unionists currently under detention is attached.

Global union lobbying organised so far

On 29 May 2009, EI, together with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), wrote to the Turkish Government to protest against these anti-union attacks. Egitim-Sen and KESK received support from many trade union organisations around the world. However the authorities disregarded the international appeals to stop the attacks.



On 9 June, the case of Turkey was considered by the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards during the International Labour Conference in Geneva. In its conclusions, the Committee "noted with concern the information provided with respect to recent mass arrests of trade unionists, as well as the allegations of a generalized antiunion climate. (...) It once again emphasized that respect for basic civil liberties was an essential prerequisite to the exercise of freedom of association and urged the Government to take all necessary measures to ensure a climate free from violence, pressure or threats of any kind so that workers and employers could fully and freely exercise their rights under the Convention."

What your organisation can do to support Turkish colleagues

1. Write letters to urge the Turkish authorities to (a model letter is attached):

- review all cases of detained trade unionists with a view to their release;
- respect and guarantee the fundamental trade union rights of workers' organisations like Egitim-Sen and KESK, including freedom of association and to collective bargaining, freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly, and to stop impeding their activities.

All communications to the Turkish authorities should be sent by fax, in addition to the electronic communication:

- Ministry of Justice, Mr Sadullah Ergin:
 - Fax: +90 312 419 33 70
 - Email: sadullahergin@adalet.gov.tr
- President of Turkey, His Excellency Abdullah Gül:
 - Fax: +90 312 470 13 16
 - Email: cumhurbaskanligi@tccb.gov.tr
- Prime Minister, Mr Recep Tayyip Erdogan:
 - Fax: +90 312 417 04 76
 - +90 312 419 20 71

Please copy your letters to the diplomatic representatives of Turkey in your country, as well as to your Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

2. Give visibility to the situation of trade unionists and teachers in Turkey in your magazine, on your website, during meetings and via other appropriate means.

3. Send solidarity messages to Egitim-Sen: - by email: international@egitimsen.org.tr
- by fax: +90 (312) 439.01.18

Please keep EI informed of your initiatives. EI will of course keep you updated on all development. For additional information or to discuss possible action, contact the EI Human and Trade Union Rights Coordinator.

EI and Egitim-Sen thank you in advance for your support of our Turkish colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

Fred van Leeuwen
General Secretary