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Brussels, 28 June 2012

Re: Raids against trade union offices, detention of 71 union members and leaders

Dear Prime Minister,

Education International (EI), the global union federation of teachers representing 30 million members in more than 170 countries, is writing to condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the full-scale attacks against trade union organisations which have taken place on 25 June in 21 Turkish cities. In these attacks, union offices as well as houses of trade union leaders were raided and searched, sometimes causing damage, and no less than 71 trade union members and leaders were detained.

According to our information, the police raided the offices of the Confederation of Public Sector Workers' Unions (KESK) and of the EI-affiliated teacher union Egitim-Sen in the early hours of Monday 25 June 2012. Simultaneously, the headquarters of a number of other KESK-affiliated unions, such as BTS, Tarım Orkam-Sen, SES, Tüm Bel-Sen, ESM and Haber-Sen, as well as trade union branch offices and houses of trade unionists, were raided in a number of provinces including Istanbul, Ankara, Diyarbakır, Ağrı, Bitlis, Siirt, Adana and Eskişehir.

The arrested trade unionists include 3 members of the Executive Board of Egitim-Sen – Mehmet Bozgeyik, General Secretary; Sakine Eren Yılmaz, Gender Secretary and Abdullah Karahan, Secretary for Financial Affairs. Many members and branch executives of Egitim Sen and other unions are also under custody.

Mr. Prime Minister, the list of acts of intimidation and harassment by your authorities against trade unions and their leaders and members is a terribly long one. We understand the pretext of this large-scale attack was an operation against an illegal terrorist organisation, as it has been on countless occasions during the years under the rule of your Justice and Development Party (AKP). One of the sad highlights of the disgraceful misuse of your country's anti-terrorism laws was the sentencing, on 28 October last year, of 25 Egitim-Sen and KESK members to six years and five months' imprisonment by the Izmir Criminal Court. The "evidence" against them included possession of books that can be found in any bookstore in Turkey, and the holding of union meetings. Owing to the lack of evidence, it had appeared that the defendants were going to be acquitted, until two of the judges were summarily removed from the trial just before the final hearing. Even the Chief Justice was in favour of an acquittal. KESK and Egitim-Sen subsequently lodged an appeal against the Criminal Court decision.

So far, the first link between Turkey's trade unions and any real or perceived terrorist organisation has yet to be found; however, your authorities leave no opportunity untapped



to refer to such an alleged link as an excuse for whichever repressive measure they feel like taking at any given moment.

The abuse of the legal system to undermine trade union rights is a very serious infringement of Convention 87 on Freedom of Association, which your country has ratified. It is one of the main reasons that your country has to defend its case, year after year, in the Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS) at the annual conference of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva.

EI condemns these anti-union harassment tactics in the strongest possible terms and urges your government to immediately and unconditionally release all 71 detained trade unionists. EI requests once again that Turkey abides by its international obligations to secure the human and trade union rights and freedoms of its workers and to ensure a climate free from violence, pressure or threats of any kind against trade unions and their members.

Yours sincerely,

Fred van Leeuwen
General Secretary

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- Egitim Sen