

7 July 2017

## **Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: Liz Throssell**

**Location:** Geneva

**Subject:** (1) Turkey (2) China (3) Cambodia

### **(1) Turkey**

We have received reports that eight Turkish human rights defenders and two international experts were detained on the Büyükkada Island near Istanbul on Wednesday 5 July while taking part in a training workshop.

We fear they are now at significant risk of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

Their detention period has now been extended to seven days and they are reportedly being interrogated over allegations of "membership of an armed terrorist organisation". This underscores our concerns that anti-terror legislation is being abused to oppress individuals trying to exercise peacefully their civil and political rights.

It is of particular concern that they were detained during a workshop on digital security and protection for human rights defenders.

The detainees include senior leaders of the Turkish human rights movement. The Director of Amnesty International Turkey, Idil Eser İknur, is among them, along with other senior figures such as Ms. İlknur Üstün of the Women's Coalition, Mr. Veli Acı and Mr. Günal Kurşun of the Human Rights Agenda Association, Ms. Nalan Erkem, Mr. Şeyhmuz Özbekli and Ms. Özlem Dalkıran of Helsinki Citizens Assembly, and Mr. Nejat Taştan of the Equal Rights Watch Association. Mr. Ali Garawi of Sweden and Mr. Peter Steudtner of Germany, who facilitated the training, were also detained, along with the owner of the hotel where the workshop was taking place.

This new wave of detentions is deeply worrying as it comes a month after the Chairperson of Amnesty International Turkey, Mr. Taner Kiliç, was arrested, along with 22 other lawyers. Mr Kiliç and six others remain in custody.

We are also extremely concerned about two other human rights defenders - Ms. Nuriye Gülmen, a university lecturer, and Mr. Semih Özakça, a school teacher - who went on hunger strike in March in protest against their arbitrary dismissal in the context of last year's sweeping purges. They were arrested in May for allegedly aiding terrorism by publicizing the issue of the dismissals. Today, nearly four months into their hunger strike, they are now reportedly so weak that their mobility has been severely affected.

We call upon the Turkish Government to release and reinstate them in their jobs without delay, and to ensure adequate compensation for their unlawful arrest and dismissal.

We are gravely concerned about all arbitrary arrests and detentions of human rights defenders in Turkey. In the context of the state of emergency, the Government seems to have criminalized the legitimate exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and freedom of opinion and expression, using emergency decrees that fail to meet international human rights standards.

Human rights defenders must not be silenced. We urge the Turkish Government to ensure that they can carry out their legitimate work in a safe and enabling environment without fear.

## **(2) China**

We are very concerned at reports that Liu Xiaobo's health has seriously deteriorated over the past 24 hours. As you know, we have been engaging with the Chinese authorities about the situation of Liu Xiaobo and his wife, Liu Xia.

The High Commissioner has requested that a senior UN official be urgently granted access to Liu Xiaobo and to Liu Xia. However, we have so far received no response from the Chinese Government to this request.

Amid these latest reports of the deterioration of his health, we do believe the UN should be granted access to the couple

The welcome request for medical support for Liu Xiaobo should also be responded to urgently.

The High Commissioner, given the urgency and seriousness of the situation, will continue to follow developments regarding Liu Xiaobo and Liu Xia closely.

## **(3) Cambodia**

We wholeheartedly welcome the release on bail of five Cambodian human rights defenders, who had been in pre-trial detention since April 2016; and we equally welcome the dropping of all legal proceedings against a member of our own staff, Mr. Soen Sally, who had been charged in the same case. The case against him was formally withdrawn on 29 June 2017.

However, these positive developments come at a time when the environment for human rights defenders and civil society organizations in Cambodia is still giving rise to considerable concern.

Of those freed on bail, Mr. Ny Sokha, Mr. Yi Soksan, Mr. Nay Vanda and Ms. Lim Mony are senior staff members from the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) – while Mr. Ny Chakrya is the Deputy Secretary General of the National Election Committee. All five were freed on bail on 29 June 2017.

We do remain concerned that the trials against them are proceeding despite the lack of evidence and legal reasoning to justify the charges. We will continue to monitor closely the proceedings against them, until the case is completely closed.

**ENDS**

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