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Kathmandu, Nepal

### Concern over Turkish Court's Verdict to Jail HRDs

We are appalled by the decision of an Istanbul court to convict four human rights defenders, including two former Amnesty International Turkey leaders, of charges related to terrorism.

On Friday, the court in Istanbul convicted Taner Kilic, former chair of Amnesty Turkey, for “membership of a terrorist organization”; and İdil Eser, former director of Amnesty Turkey, and Amnesty International members Özlem Dalkiran, and Günel Kursun of “assisting the Fethullah Gülen terrorist organization” in a case that has come to be known as “the Büyükada trial”.

Kilic was sentenced to six years and three months and the other three were handed a 25 months’ prison sentence. Seven other defendants were acquitted.

It's been clear from the start that this was a politically motivated case aimed at silencing rights defenders and independent activists in Turkey. Since the case began in 2017, prosecutors have failed to present any shred of credible evidence of wrongdoing against these human rights defenders. Each allegation against the rights defenders have been exposed as a baseless slur during the multiple court hearings.

At the time of their arrests, the defendants were participating in a human rights workshop, which the authorities in Turkey deemed a "secret meeting." The terrorism charges and the subsequent conviction of the four human rights activists for simply participating in a workshop is shocking and unacceptable.

The only crime these brave human rights defenders are guilty of is standing up for justice for others.

We are deeply concerned about the court's decision and stand with our colleagues as they prepare to appeal the verdict. These individuals have devoted their entire lives to fighting for the rights of others and have been punished for doing so.

They are innocent and they must be acquitted.

We hope that the Appeals Court will right the wrong and overturn the guilty verdict.

## BACKGROUND:

The case involving the 11 human rights defenders in Turkey began in the summer of 2017 when they were arrested and charged on terrorism charges. Taner Kilic, then chair of Amnesty Turkey, was arrested at his home in Izmir and remanded in custody on charges of being a member of the Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organization which the government says masterminded the 2016 Coup. The authorities claimed that Taner had downloaded ByLock, a secure messaging application which the government says was used by the group to coordinate the coup. The other ten human rights defenders were detained from a hotel on the island of Büyükada in Istanbul where they were taking part in a workshop on wellbeing and digital security. The authorities had accused them of taking part in a secret meeting. Kilic spent fourteen months in jail before being released on bail in August 2018.

Signed by,

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