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Mr Recep Tayyip Erdogan
Prime Minister
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TUR/FW

19 April 2007

Jail sentences for trade union leaders

Dear Prime Minister,

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents 307 affiliated member organizations, with a total membership of 168 million workers in 154 countries and territories, including Turkey, and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which represents 60 million workers throughout Europe, strongly condemn the legal proceedings that have been brought against 11 Turkish trade union leaders, and the jail sentences that may result from these.

On 2 December 2005, the ITUC wrote to you to protest at the violent repression of the peaceful teachers' demonstration in Ankara of 26 November 2005. As a result of this action ordered by the Turkish authorities, 17 teachers were injured, and ten of them arrested, merely for exercising their legitimate trade union rights.

After this demonstration, the public prosecutor brought a lawsuit against 11 Executive Committee members of a number of unions which all belong to the ITUC-affiliated Confederation of Public Employees' Unions (KESK), namely: **Dr. Ismail Hakki Tombul** (President of KESK), **Alaaddin Dinçer** (President of Egitim Sen), **Bülent Kaya** (former President of BES), **Köksal Aydın** (President of SES), **Bedri Tekin** (President of YAPI YOL Sen), **Fehmi Kutan** (former President of BTS), **Emirali Simsek** (General Secretary of Egitim Sen), **Özgür Bozdoğan** (President of Egitim Sen Ankara Branch Nr. 1), **Abdullah Çiftçi** (President of Egitim Sen Ankara Branch Nr. 2), **Erkan Sümer** (General Secretary of SES) and **Murat Kahraman** (Executive Committee member of Egitim Sen Ankara Branch Nr. 1).

They were all sentenced to one year and three months imprisonment and a fine of 407 YTL each. While the sentences of nine of the above-mentioned trade union leaders were suspended, the sentences for KESK President Ismail Hakki Tombul and former BTS President Fehmi Kutan were not. If these sentences were to be confirmed by the Turkish Higher Court of Appeal, both union leaders would be sent to prison.

Mr. President, sending trade union leaders to prison because they exert their legitimate trade union rights is completely unacceptable. The demonstration which they had organised was perfectly legal, and furthermore conducted in a peaceful manner. The ITUC and the ETUC once more stress the importance of respecting fundamental trade union rights such as freedom of association and the freedom to organise and bargain collectively. May we remind you that Turkey is obliged to observe these internationally recognised rights by virtue of its ratification of ILO Conventions 87 and 98. The violent repression of peaceful demonstrations, and the relentless prosecution of trade union leaders is clearly contrary to the respect of these rights.

We therefore urge you to take the necessary measures in order to ensure that the charges brought against the above-mentioned trade union leaders be dropped immediately, and to fully implement trade union rights in Turkey. If not, we will have no other option than to lodge a complaint with the Committee on Freedom of Association of the ILO in Geneva. Clearly this could considerably damage Turkey's position in its negotiations for accession to the European Union, given in particular the position taken by the EU in relation to Chapter 19 on Social Policy and Employment.

Yours sincerely,

General Secretary
ITUC

General Secretary
ETUC

Cc Embassy of Turkey, Brussels
Mission of Turkey to the EU
European Commissioner for Enlargement, Mr. Olli Rehn
KESK