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TURKEY: 18 rights and lawyers' groups express concern to the UN as a trial against 46 lawyers under terrorism charges is due to open on July 16

Amsterdam-Ankara-Brussels-Geneva-Grenoble-Montpellier-Ottawa-Paris-Rennes, July 13, 2012.
18 rights and lawyers' groups express concern to the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders as a trial under terrorism charges is due to open in Istanbul on July 16, 2012.

On July 16, 2012, a trial against 46 lawyers from the Ağrı, Ardahan, Batman, Bursa, Diyarbakır, Denizli, Hakkari, İstanbul, İzmir, Kars, Mersin, Muş, Siirt, Şırnak, Urfa, Van Bar Associations, together with one journalist and three staff working for a law firm, will open before the İstanbul Heavy Penal Court No. 6. 36 of the lawyers are in pre-trial detention since November 2011.

All of them have been involved in the legal representation of Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the armed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and have been accused of “passing orders”. They are prosecuted under charges of being “members” or “executives” “in an illegal organisation”, namely the alleged terrorist network known as the Kurdish Communities Union (KCK) - an organisation considered by the authorities to be the “urban branch” of PKK.

Similar trials are ongoing or pending against other key Kurdish or pro-Kurdish civil society actors, including political activists, members of human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trade unionists, journalists, intellectuals, academics and writers.

Yesterday, 18 rights and lawyers' groups submitted a joint communication to the two UN special procedures to request them to closely monitor the situation and formulate clear recommendations to the Turkish authorities to ensure respect for fair trial standards and, more generally, a safe and conducive environment for human rights defenders operating in the country in conformity with their international and regional human rights treaty obligations and other international standards.

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