

PRESS RELEASE

28 December 2022

Tomorrow renowned Turkish doctor and human rights defender Prof. Dr. Şebnem Korur Fincancı will undergo a second judicial hearing on baseless charges in Istanbul Heavy Penalty Court. Due process violations, lack of evidence, and ill-treatment of Dr. Korur Fincancı during her transfer suggest that her arrest is a gross miscarriage of justice. International medical and human rights organisations including the CPME (Comité Permanent des Médecins Européens), the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), the World Medical Association and others stand in solidarity with their Turkish medical and human rights counterparts in calling for her immediate and unconditional release and acquittal on fraudulent charges of “making terrorist propaganda.”

Just days before, on 23 December, Dr. Korur Fincancı addressed the court, which was ruling on her release from pre-trial detention, in a small, stuffy courtroom overflowing with supporters and independent observers, while thousands of armed riot police surrounded the courthouse. The three-judge panel introduced arbitrary rules during the proceedings, such as limiting Dr. Korur Fincancı’s legal representation to only three lawyers. Despite her lawyers’ appeal for a safe and dignified transfer from Ankara to Istanbul criminal court, the sixty-three-year-old was subjected to a five and a half hour ride in a van in handcuffs. IRCT and PHR, which monitored her hearing on 23 December, condemn these due process violations, the lack of evidence against her, and her gratuitous ill-treatment as manifestations of an unfair trial and groundless detention.

Citing Kant, Socrates and Tacitus, Dr. Korur Fincancı, who served for years on the editorial committee of the Istanbul Protocol for documenting and investigating torture, spoke of the sanctity of science and forensic science in particular as a means to the truth. With seven gendarmerie hovering over her, she proclaimed her commitment to the international human rights movement and to upholding the right to free speech. Citing the political nature of the charges, Dr. Korur Fincancı’s defense attorney told the court, “There is no crime here. She is a brave woman. The judge must be brave, too, and release her.”

The case against Dr. Korur Fincancı coincides with a broader government attack on Turkey’s independent medical community. The members of the Central Council of the Turkish Medical Association (TMA) are facing baseless criminal charges for alleged collaboration with terrorist organisations, and legislative attempts to strip the TMA of its autonomy are underway. Central Council members face imminent arrest on charges the prosecution has not yet shared with them. The trumped-up criminal charges against Dr. Korur Fincancı and other leading Turkish physicians challenges the essential independence of the medical profession, which is a central pillar of societies based on good governance and rule of law.

The CPME, IRCT and PHR call on the Turkish authorities to respect Dr. Korur Fincancı's right to free speech and acquit her of these false charges. "Attacks on one physician are an attack on all of us, and indeed against the practice of medicine," said Dr. Michele Heisler, Medical Director of Physicians for Human Rights. "Dr. Korur Fincancı's continued detention and the unlawful charges against her are harmful to Turkish society as a whole. We demand her full acquittal and long overdue release."

Lisa Henry, Secretary General of the IRCT, said: "Şebnem is a human rights defender, and her right to defend human rights and express herself freely is essential to ensuring that the people of Türkiye and the world can enjoy their universal human rights."