

Harsh prison terms against ÖHD lawyers for legitimate professional activities: convictions must be overturned

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Lawyers for Lawyers strongly condemns the sentencing of lawyers and members of the Association of Lawyers for freedom (*Özgürlük için Hukukçular Derneği*, ÖHD) by the Istanbul 14th Heavy Penal court on 28 January 2026 and calls for the convictions to be quashed. After nearly a decade of proceedings, the court sentenced 10 lawyers – including Ramazan Demir, Ayşe Acinikli, Sinan Zincir and Hüseyin Boğatekin – to prison terms of up to 11 years and 3 months for alleged terrorism-related offences under Türkiye’s anti-terror legislation. Besides the lawyers, members of the Association for Solidarity with Prisoners’ Families (*Tutuklu Aileleri Yardımlaşma Derneği*, TUAD) were also convicted.

The verdict raises serious concerns about fair trial rights and due process guarantees and follows an unsettling pattern of misuse of excessively broad anti-terrorism statutes against lawyers for carrying out their legitimate professional activities.

10 years of proceedings against the ÖHD lawyers

Since 2018, Lawyers for Lawyers has observed the proceedings against 12 lawyers associated with the ÖHD, who – together with 37 members of TUAD – have been on trial since 2016 on suspicion of ‘membership’, ‘collaboration’, or ‘leadership of a terrorist organisation’, as well as ‘spreading terrorism propaganda’. The charges relate to allegations that, between 2011 and 2014, they facilitated communication between prisoners and the outside world. The convictions are based on article 314(2) of the Turkish Criminal Code (membership of a terrorist organisation) and article 7(2) of the Anti-Terror Law No. 3713 (spreading propaganda for a terrorist organisation) – provisions frequently misused to criminalise legitimate professional activities and the exercise of human rights.

The following sentences were imposed on the ÖHD lawyers:

- **Adem Çalışçi:** 1 year and 3 months (propaganda)
- **Ayşe Acinikli:** 6 years and 3 months (for membership)
- **Ayşe Gösterişlioğlu:** 6 years and 3 months (for membership)
- **Hüseyin Boğatekin:** 7 years and 6 months (for membership)
- **Ramazan Demir:** 7 years and 6 months (for membership) and 3 years and 9 months (for propaganda)
- **Raziye Öztürk:** 6 years and 3 months (for membership)
- **Ruhşen Mahmutoğlu:** 6 years and 3 months (for membership)
- **Şefik Çelik:** 1 year and 3 months (propaganda)
- **Sinan Zincir:** 7 years and 6 months (for membership)
- **Tamer Doğan:** 4 years and 6 months (propaganda) and 1 year and 2 months (insult to president)

Two lawyers, İrfan Arasan and Mustafa Rüzgâr, have been acquitted. The remaining convictions of the TUAD-members are similarly connected to their legitimate human rights work.

The ÖHD-trial has been marked by serious and persistent fair trial violations, as documented through multiple international [trial monitoring missions](#). The prosecution has failed to present substantial evidence to support the charges against the lawyers. Instead, the indictment relied on activities that fall within the scope of their legitimate professional and advocacy activities, such as representing their clients in political cases, visiting their clients in prison, filing applications before the European Court of Human Rights, and engaging with international human rights organisations.

As Lawyers for Lawyers and partners have repeatedly [remarked](#), the prolonged nature of the proceedings, the use of anonymous witnesses, and the reliance on evidence connected to legitimate defence work give rise to serious concerns about violations of Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Systematic criminalisation of lawyers' legitimate activities in Türkiye

These convictions are not an isolated incident but occur within a broader context of a systemic erosion of the rule of law in Türkiye. Attacks on lawyers range from threats and surveillance to judicial harassment, including criminal prosecution, arbitrary arrests and detention. Lawyers for Lawyers and its partners have extensively [documented](#) the prosecution of lawyers in Türkiye. Since 2011, Turkish authorities have prosecuted hundreds of lawyers on similar terrorism-related charges, often linked to their representation of clients in politically sensitive cases or their engagement in lawful advocacy. Activities like visiting clients, issuing press statements, contacting international bodies, or publicly discussing legal matters have led to judicial harassment and convictions. These prosecutions have frequently lacked evidence and failed to meet internationally recognised standards of fair trial and due process, thus undermining the rule of law and access to justice.

Türkiye must respect its obligations under international law

Lawyers for Lawyers recalls Türkiye's obligations under the ICCPR and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), notably the rights to a fair trial (14 ICCPR; 6 ECHR) and freedom of expression (19 ICCPR; 10 ECHR) and association (22 ICCPR; 11 ECHR). As repeatedly held by the [European Court of Human Rights](#) and [UN Human Rights Committee](#), the misuse of broad anti-terrorism legislation to punish lawful legal and human rights work is incompatible with these human rights.

In addition, the prosecution and criminalisation of lawyers for activities related to their professional duties constitutes a clear violation of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers. Principle 16 stipulates that lawyers shall not be prosecuted for actions taken in accordance with recognised professional duties and standards, while Principles 18 and 23 further protect lawyers' freedom of expression, association, and independent professional conduct. These guarantees are further reflected in the recently adopted Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyers.

The criminalisation of lawyers carrying out their professional duties not only violates international norms relating to the independence of lawyers but also severely restricts access to justice in

Türkiye. The chilling effect of such prosecutions extends well beyond the individual defendants, while also affecting the entire legal community and those they represent.

We call on the relevant authorities in Türkiye to:

1. Immediately review and overturn the verdicts against the ÖHD lawyers and TUAD members, as they have been convicted for carrying out their legitimate professional activities and human rights work.
2. Cease the misuse of anti-terrorism legislation against lawyers and human rights defenders exercising their professional duties and fundamental freedoms protected by international law and bring such legislation into full compliance with the ICCPR and principles of legality and certainty.
3. Promptly sign and ratify the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyers and take immediate steps to align domestic law and practice with its safeguards.
4. Ensure that all lawyers and human rights defenders in Türkiye are able to perform their professional duties without fear of reprisals, harassment, or undue interference, in accordance with international standards.