



EJDM Europäische Vereinigung von Juristinnen und Juristen für Demokratie und Menschenrechte in der Welt e.V.

ELDH European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights

EJDH Asociacion Europea de los Juristas por la Democracia y los Derechos Humanos en el Mundo

EJDH Association Européenne des Juristes pour la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme dans le Monde

EGDU Associazione Europea delle Giuriste e dei Giuristi per la Democrazia e i Diritti dell'Uomo nel Mondo

Professor Bill Bowring, President (London)
Professeure Monique CHEMILLIER- GENDREAU, Présidente d'honneur (Paris)
Thomas SCHMIDT (Rechtsanwalt) Secretary General (Duesseldorf)

28 May 2008

Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan
Prime Minister
Republic of Turkey
Ankara

TURKEY

Excessive police violence at Labour Day in Istanbul

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

The European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights ELDH strongly protests against the violence used by Turkish riot police and security forces against trade unionists who wanted to participate in a Labour Day rally in Istanbul on 1 May 2008. According to the Istanbul Governor Muammer Guler, 530 demonstrators were detained and 38 people were injured. There are sources which estimate that these numbers are much higher.

According to our information, the Turkish police used clubs, pepper spray, tear gas and red-dye water cannons to break up crowds of workers and students trying to reach Taksim square. The DISK headquarters were completely blocked by security forces with barricades and police forces so that nobody could get in or out anymore. This was done notwithstanding the fact that the unions had announced that they would continue to rally elsewhere, as they feared that, after such a display of force by the Turkish police, the damage would be too great and innocent people and shop owners would be harmed or get hurt. Although the police knew that the building was full of people, they nevertheless continued to use teargas. In the end, a great number of people were injured, executives from DISK- and KESK-affiliated trade unions were arrested and beaten by the police, and DISK and KESK union leaders were prevented from moving to a safer place.

Mr. Prime Minister, the images that were shown around the world left few doubts as to whether the force used by the Turkish police was excessive or not. Reports by the Turkish trade unions

President
Professor Bill BOWRING (Barrister)
Barrister, Professor of Law
Birkbeck College, University of London
School of Law
Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX
Direct tel: +44 (0)20 7631 6022
Law School office: +44 (0)20 7631 6507
Fax: +44 (0)20 7631 6506
Mobile: +44 (0) 781 048 3439
E-mail: bill.bowring@eldh.eu

Secretary General

Thomas SCHMIDT, Rechtsanwalt
Platanenstrasse 13
D - 40233 - DUESSELDORF
FON: + 49 - (0)211 - 444 001
MOBILFON: + 49 - (0)172 - 68 10 888
FAX: + 49 - (0)211 - 444 027
eMail: secretary.general@eldh.eu
www.eldh.eu

were corroborated by a statement from the Istanbul Bar Association, which said that the police had used excessive force on demonstrators.

As European Lawyers for Human Rights and Democracy from 15 European countries we insist that the freedom of assembly, the freedom of association, the freedom of expression and trade union rights are essential pillars of democracy. In 2007 more than 700 persons were detained at the 1 May demonstration in Istanbul. As lawyers we find that this continuation of the abuse of police power in 2008, and the disregard of international and European law which has been ratified by Turkey, are intolerable. The European Commission stated again in its progress report 2007, that Turkey fails to fully implement the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions. After the events of 1 May in Istanbul the next report, for 2008, cannot be any better. Furthermore, the European Parliament stated in its resolution of 21 May 2008, that : "Is concerned by the excessive force used by Turkish police against demonstrators at the 2008 May Day rally in Istanbul; reaffirms that freedom of association and the peaceful operations of trade unions represent a fundamental right under the ECHR".

We therefore call on you to ensure that Turkey adheres to the principles of freedom of association and of the basic trade union rights as enshrined in the fundamental ILO conventions which Turkey has ratified. We fully agree with the demand of the European Parliament that, if the year 2008 is really going to be the year of reforms in Turkey, as has been announced by you yourself, Mr. Prime Minister, the Turkish government must "fulfil its promises by making use of its strong parliamentary majority to resolutely pursue reforms that are crucial for Turkey's transformation into a modern and prosperous democracy based on a secular state and a pluralistic society."

Thomas Schmidt
Secretary General