URGENT ACTION

RELEASE DETAINED LGBTI RIGHTS DEFENDERS

At least 23 LGBTI rights defenders, including board and oversight committee members of Türkiye's foremost LGBTI rights organization KAOS GL, Janset Kalan, Nedime Erdoğan, Umut Derin and Selin Berghan, and journalist, Tuğba Tekerek, have been detained alongside more than 100 people in a police operation targeting LGBTI people and organizations that began on 12 September. The five named individuals have been remanded in pretrial detention in Ankara's Sincan prison on charges of 'obscenity' and 'violating the Law on Associations.' The LGBTI rights defenders and journalist are being deprived of their liberty solely for exercising their human rights and must be released immediately and unconditionally.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor
Aykut Çelik
Hacı Bayram Veli Mahallesi
Atatürk Bulvarı No:40 Sıhhiye/Ankara
06050 Türkiye
Email: ankaracbs@adalet.gov.tr
X: @ankaracbs

Dear Chief Public Prosecutor,

I am writing to express my serious concern regarding the pretrial detention of at least 23 LGBTI rights defenders, including board and oversight committee members from Türkiye's foremost LGBTI rights organization KAOS GL, ***Janset Kalan****,* ***Nedime Erdoğan****,* ***Umut Derin*** *and* ***Selin Berghan*** *as well as journalist* ***Tuğba Tekerek.*** *They were detained in the context of the "My Family is Safe" police operation targeting LGBTI people and organizations, which began on 12 September. They have been deprived of their liberty in connection with their work as board members and, in the case of Tuğba Tekerek, her journalistic work.*

The abovementioned human rights defenders and journalist were questioned and remanded in pretrial detention on charges of 'obscenity' and 'violating the Law on Associations.' The decision to deprive them of their liberty pending prosecution is arbitrary, punitive and discriminatory. The accusation of obscenity relates to drawings alleged to be present on KAOS GL's website and to be accessible for children even though the website has been inaccessible in Türkiye since June 2025. The journalist Tuğba Tekerek remains in pretrial detention for allegedly "being responsible for the organisation's Instagram account," which she is not. In any event, managing or contributing to an LGBTI organization's social media account is a legitimate exercise of freedom of expression and association and cannot justify deprivation of liberty.

LGBTI rights organizations have reported alleged instances of physical and verbal abuse, degrading strip searches and threats inadequate healthcare and medication, and inadequate food while in pretrial detention, raising serious concerns about the well-being and safety of those detained.

I respectfully urge your office to drop the charges against the human rights defenders and journalist and ensure their immediate release. Pending their release, they must be held in conditions that meet international standards and all allegations of ill-treatment must be effectively investigated. I further urge you to ensure that their rights to freedom of expression and association are fully protected in line with Türkiye's obligations under international human rights law. I also call for the release of all others detained during the "My Family is Safe" operation solely for exercising their rights or because of who they are.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 12 September, police carried out raids across five provinces (Izmir, Aydın, Ankara, Mersin and Istanbul) of homes and offices of LGBTI people, including activists and LGBTI rights organizations, as well as several entertainment venues. The operation, dubbed “My Family is Safe,” led to the detention of at least 117 people and confiscation of digital materials and equipment. Of those detained, 44 were LGBTI rights defenders. The operation targeted the founders of four LGBTI organizations and two HIV related organizations in Istanbul, current principal and alternate members of the executive and supervisory boards of one LGBTI organization in Ankara, and the current principal executive and supervisory board members of two LGBTI organizations in Mersin. In addition, at least 27 LGBTI people, the majority of whom are trans women, and others with no connections to the organization were also detained.

At least 83 individuals have been remanded in pretrial detention in Aydın, Ankara, Mersin and Istanbul provinces. The majority of those remanded in prison are trans women charged with sex work and/or obscenity-related offences, while others have been accused of obscenity and drug-related offences. Of the 44 rights defenders initially detained by police, at least 23 LGBTI activists or individuals connected to LGBTI associations were placed in pretrial detention, including founders and members of oversight bodies, whose houses were raided and their digital equipment seized. They have been imprisoned under charges of violating the Law on Associations and obscenity.

Social media accounts of LGBTI organizations and activists, as well as social media accounts belonging to journalists, human rights organizations and actors expressing solidarity with LGBTI people or sharing information about the operations have also been restricted, with at least 419 social media accounts blocked from access in Türkiye since 12 September as part of this operation. On 30 September, the independent news website T24 was blocked in Türkiye by court decision citing ‘118 LGBTI related news stories having been published in the last year’ alleging this amounts to ‘LGBTI propaganda’ which is not currently a recognizable offence in Türkiye. Meanwhile, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly of those protesting this wave of harassment has also been unjustly restricted, with 125 protestors detained in total across Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir. They were later released.

On 14 September, the Ministry of Justice issued a circular instructing 175 prosecutors in all of Türkiye’s 81 provinces to prioritise investigations into complaints under the operation, using the “public morality” framework by explicitly referring to activities allegedly encouraging “genderlessness” among children and young people.

In the last two years, three sets of leaked proposals included measures that, if adopted, would have criminalized any expression of LGBTI identities, including consensual same-sex sexual activity, and access to vital gender-affirming healthcare. The leaked proposals included jail terms based on gender stereotypes, how they present themselves, and who they chose to be in a relationship with as well criminalizing any positive discussion of LGBTI related issues for ‘encouraging, promoting or praising’ LGBTI people. These proposals were subsequently not tabled following widespread opposition in Türkiye. The crackdown which began on 12 September represents a deeply concerning escalation in the attacks on the rights and freedoms of LGBTI people and the criminalization of those advocating for them in Türkiye.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English; Turkish
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 02 April 2027
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Janset Kalan (she/her), Nedime Erdoğan (she/her), Umut Derin (he/him), Selin Berghan (she/her), Tuğba Tekerek (she/her)