

International delegation to attend trial of Ayşe Berktaş (Hacımirzaoglu) in Turkey

During the past three years, the Turkish state has imprisoned some 8000 citizens under the guise of fighting terrorism. In a wave of detentions known as the “KCK operations,” it has targeted activists, academics, journalists, lawyers, students, elected officials, translators and publishers on account of their democratic activities in support of the rights demanded by Kurdish citizens in Turkey.

In particular, numerous members and supporters of the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party)—which has 36 elected representatives in the Turkish Parliament—have been criminalized and imprisoned on the pretext that they are alleged members of the KCK (Union of Communities in Kurdistan), a group which the Turkish state claims to be the urban branch of an armed organization known as the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party). Professor Busra Ersanlı is the best known of those who were thus imprisoned in 2011, together with the publisher Ragıp Zarakolu, who has since been released.

We now wish to focus public attention on Ayşe Berktaş (Hacımirzaoglu), a respected translator, researcher and global peace and justice activist. Since her arrest in October 2011 during the “KCK operations,” she has been held in pre-trial detention in Bakırköy Women’s Prison in Istanbul. Nine months after her initial incarceration, Ayşe Berktaş’s trial, along with others, is scheduled to run from *July 2nd to July 13th, 2012* in Silivri, near Istanbul.

As participants in the (former) World Tribunal on Iraq (WTI) network, we have now formed an international delegation to observe the trial of Ayşe Berktaş. She helped found the World Tribunal on Iraq in 2003, and was a principal organizer of its culminating session in Istanbul, which took place in June 2005. We know Ayşe Berktaş to be a person of great integrity and honesty. She is not a terrorist, but an idealist who is committed to peace and democracy.

We return to Istanbul to register our solidarity with Ayşe Berktaş and others who have been targeted as alleged terrorists for democratically challenging the Turkish state’s violent handling of the “Kurdish issue” in Turkey. We recognize that the “KCK operations” are used to spread fear amongst activists, to silence public dissent, and to normalize the arbitrary arrest of citizens. The mass arrests of peaceful activists and intellectuals, their lengthy pre-trial detention, and the ensuing trials constitute a source of shame for Turkey, at a time when “Turkish democracy” is sometimes hailed as a model for the Arab world.

We urge the Turkish Government to stop suppressing democratic efforts in support of rights demanded by Kurdish citizens in Turkey. We urge the Turkish government to stop criminalising activism under the guise of counter-terrorism. We demand the immediate release of Ayşe Berktaş and all political prisoners in Turkey!

We intend to be present in the courtroom as international observers during the proceedings. The names of the international delegates are appended below. Members of the international delegation are available for media interviews prior to and during their stay in Turkey.

APPENDIX
**International Delegation of the WTI-Network
(World Tribunal on Iraq, 2003-2005)**

Group 1 (July 2-3-4):

Fabio Marcelli, Italian lawyer, International Association of Democratic Lawyers;
European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights

Maria Louisa Martin Abia, Spanish lawyer, member of the International Association
of Democratic Lawyers and European Association of Democratic Lawyers.

Lieven De Cauter, Belgian philosopher, professor at Leuven University, president of
the BRussells Tribunal, co-founder of the WTI.

Group 2 (July 11-12-13):

Tony Simpson, director of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation and editor of
The Spokesman Journal

Paloma Valverde, coordinator of the Spanish antiwar organisation CEOSI, member
of the IAON network.

Pedro Rojo, coordinator of the Spanish antiwar organisation CEOSI, member of the
IAON network; co-founder of the WTI (Spanish sessions)

Ayça Çubukçu, Assistant Professor in Human Rights at the London School of
Economics and Political Science, co-founder of the WTI (New York session).

Patrick Deboosere, political scientist, professor of demography at the Free
University of Brussels, co-founder of the BRussells Tribunal and the WTI.

See Ayşe Berktaş's letter from prison:

<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3787/letter-from-istanbul-bakirkoy-womens-prison> See also the petition: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/detentionsinturkey/>

**Press contact: Elif Kalaycioglu - [+90 533 366 86 22](tel:+905333668622) (cell phone)
wtidelegation@gmail.com**

**UK contact: Tony Simpson at the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation
on 0115 9784504 www.russfound.org elfeuro@compuserve.com**