

Erdo?an orders Turkish Medical Association head detained: Hands off Fincanc?!

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The police detention of Prof. Dr. ?ebnem Korur Fincanc?, president of the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), from her home in Istanbul yesterday is a assault on basic democratic rights. The *World Socialist Web Site* protests her arbitrary detention and demands her release.

Fincanc?’s detention provoked protests in many cities, including Istanbul, Izmir, Diyarbak?r and Adana yesterday. The TTB’s Central Council issued a formal protest, stating: “The detention decision, which follows statements by government circles interfering in the judiciary, constitutes the final stage of the pressure that these circles have been increasing against the TTB and all labor and professional organizations for a long time.”

It asserted that President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an’s government aims to get the TTB under its control: “As a matter of fact, the government has admitted that it will use this agenda created in the public opinion for an amendment in the Law on Professional Organizations.”

Last week, Fincanc?, a forensic medicine specialist and the elected leader of the TTB, whose membership includes over 100,000 doctors, told *Medya Haber* of the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) in its ongoing operation against Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) forces in Iraqi Kurdistan. On October 18, the pro-PKK F?rat News Agency (ANF) published footage of two PKK militants allegedly exposed to chemical weapons by the Turkish army.

In an interview with *Medya Haber*, Fincanc? stated that she had watched the footage, adding: “Obviously, one of the toxic-poisonous chemical gases that directly affects the nervous system have been used. Although its use is forbidden, we see that it is used in conflicts.”

The Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office took immediate action on the instructions of the Erdo?an government to investigate Fincanc?. In a statement, it said that the investigation was opened “on charges of ... making propaganda for a terrorist organization and ... insulting the Turkish Nation, the State of the Republic of Turkey, the institutions and organs of the State due to her statements to

the so-called media organ of the PKK/YPG armed terrorist organization.” It also demanded that Fincanc? be dismissed as TTB president.

Speaking to *bianet* on the same day, Fincanc? criticized *Medya Haber*, stating: “I criticize the way my statements were presented; it was irresponsible reporting. ... I stated that these involuntary movements could occur with the effect of a chemical getting hold of the nervous system and that an effective investigation should be carried out in relation to this if there were allegations that a chemical had been used.”

Fincanc? continued: “I stated that if there was death, it was necessary to make a medical investigation according to the Minnesota Protocol and that it is compulsory that the investigation should be carried out by independent institutions since this is considered as a war crime in the scope of the Geneva Convention. However, the presentation of the news was indicating that I had proven this incident, so it was not reflected very correctly.”

“Opening an investigation to the one who is saying ‘an investigation should be made’ gives the impression of concealing a crime,” she said. However, Fincanc? has been targeted by the government and bourgeois media, despite the absence of any criminal offense, and was detained yesterday after her house was raided, even though she had previously declared her readiness to testify.

The TTB have organized numerous nationwide strikes for better wages and conditions this year. Moreover, Fincanc? and the TTB have also been in the government’s crosshairs due to its opposition to the government’s concealment and manipulation of pandemic data.

Until recently, the TTB opposed Erdo?an’s “herd immunity” policies that put profit before human life. Fincanc? also drew attention to this in the interview, saying: “We were also criminalized as a professional organization during the pandemic process when we said, ‘your data and the data we compiled from the field do not coincide.’ Human rights defenders are constantly criminalized. So it is not surprising that an investigation was opened ...”

On October 18, the Kurdish nationalist Peoples’

Democratic Party (HDP) brought the alleged use of chemical weapons before parliament and demanded an investigation. But the Defense Ministry rapidly denied the allegations. “There are no chemical weapons in the inventory of the Turkish Armed Forces,” Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said on Friday. “We respect the borders and sovereign rights of all our neighbors, especially Iraq and Syria,” Akar claimed in the same speech.

In reality, both the Syrian and Iraqi governments are demanding that Turkey withdraw its armed forces from their territory.

On the same day, Erdoğan said his government will pursue Fincancı, declaring, “My friends immediately filed lawsuits [against her] and we will definitely not let this go. We will go after her by opening both compensation and severe criminal cases. Our Armed Forces have never had any negligence such as using chemical weapons.”

Remarkably, Erdoğan also claimed these allegations were “slanders of communists,” stating: “This is not the first time they are making these slanders. They are impudent, they are immoral. This is the mud they always throw at our army. They think that if they throw mud, it will leave a trace. This [slandering] is the most important motto of communism and communists. Since these are their remnants, they will always throw such slanders. And we will hold them to account for it within the law, whatever it takes.”

On Sunday, Devlet Bahçeli, the head of the MHP, the fascistic ally of the Erdoğan government, called Fincancı a “terrorist and a criminal.” He said, “Anyone who clings to the slanders of the separatist terrorist organization PKK and accuses honorable Turkish soldiers is a terrorist, dishonorable, traitor and criminal.” On Tuesday, Bahçeli also called to close the TTB and strip Fincancı of Turkish citizenship.

TTB was also targeted by Erdoğan at the beginning of 2018. Eleven members of the TTB’s central council were detained for issuing a statement opposing the war, titled “War is a Matter of Public Health,” after Ankara’s invasion in northern Syria against the US-backed, Kurdish-nationalist People’s Protection Units (YPG) around Afrin. Prior to these detentions, Erdoğan had declared them “traitors” and “terrorist lovers.”

In Iraq, where allegations of the use of chemical weapons have been raised, the Turkish army has been conducting military operations code-named “Claw” against the PKK since 2019. After the ‘Claw Lock’ operation began this April, the Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government blamed Turkey for a bombardment in July that killed many civilians. Ankara denied the allegation, however, implicitly blaming the attack on the PKK.

The detention of the TTB’s president comes as the

government steps up attacks on democratic rights amid growing social discontent with the cost of living. Amid ongoing military operations in Iraq and Syria and growing tensions with Greece in the eastern Mediterranean, the Turkish government is promoting militarism to suppress and divert class tensions.

Moreover, a so-called censorship bill openly targeting all kinds of political and social opposition was recently passed into law. It asserts that “publicly disseminating untrue information on social media about the country’s internal and external security, public order and public health in order to create fear and panic among the public in a way that is conducive to disrupting public peace will be punishable by one to three years in prison.”

The day before Fincancı’s detention, nine Kurdish journalists working for the Mesopotamia Agency (MA) and JINNEWS were detained. The Ankara Security Directorate shared footage of the journalists being taken into custody in handcuffs, claiming that the journalists were operating under the “press committee of the PKK/KCK terrorist organization” and that they were “reporting on content that incites hatred and hostility among the public.” Last June, 16 journalists were arrested in another antidemocratic police operation against the Kurdish press. They are still being held in prison without charge.

The increasing attacks on freedom of expression, press freedom and arbitrary detentions underline once again that democratic rights cannot be defended without opposing war. This requires mobilizing the working class, the only social force that is capable of defending democratic rights, on the basis of an international anti-war and socialist program.



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