

# Fire disaster in Istanbul kills 29 workers

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In Beşiktaş, Istanbul, 29 workers lost their lives and one was seriously injured in a fire that broke out during the renovation of a nightclub in the basement of a 16-storey building.

The fire disaster is an indictment of the entire ruling elite, including business owners and officials. Running a business for years without adequate safety checks and making renovations without workplace safety measures is a product of capitalism that puts profit before human life.

According to the fire brigade, the fire started when chemical materials caught fire during welding work. As there was only one exit door at the location, the trapped workers died of smoke inhalation.

An official told *Hürriyet* that all the walls of the business were covered with highly flammable soundproofing material, but they were not covered with a fireproof material. The firefighting system was not working.

According to fire safety expert Levent Yasa, the tragedy was preventable. Speaking to *Anadolu Agency*, Yasa said that renovation work on basement floors of buildings where there are business such as wedding halls, entertainment venues and nightclubs is usually carried out in narrow time slots such as the summer months, or Ramadan. “For this reason, renovations in the food and beverage sector are a bit more urgent,” he said. “Necessary safety measures and precautions need to be taken during these renovations so that we do not have to face such incidents.”

Yasa continued: “We know that there are a lot of people inside, and we know that there are flammable construction materials stored inside. If these building materials are chemical materials, they can catch fire very quickly and a small ignition can suddenly turn into a huge fire. Necessary measures have to be taken to prevent these fires.”

Statements made by the authorities put all the

responsibility for the fire on the business owner or the renovation company. Istanbul Governor Davut Gül said, “It is a place used as a discotheque under the building. It was being renovated. Due to the renovation, workers lost their lives and were injured. Our police, health and fire brigade teams intervened at the scene from the first moment. The treatment of the injured continues in our hospitals. This nightclub had a license in 1987. In 2018, the license was renewed.”

Ekrem İmamoğlu, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB), who won the local elections for the second time on March 31, said the nightclub was licensed in 1987, that the last fire department report was issued in 2006 and that there was a license renewal process in 2018. He added: “Some construction materials etc. are piled up inside in a very irregular way. There is no renovation or building application for the workplace inside. Since the workplace is two floors below, it is a bit invisible. The district council has not received any complaints. Therefore, an illegal intervention, so to speak, was carried out inside.”

The CHP-ruled Beşiktaş District Municipality also announced that renovation was carried out illegally and without permission: “No application was submitted to our municipality regarding the alleged renovation, no permission was obtained and no information was provided.”

In 2018, Beşiktaş Municipality renewed the license of the establishment, but did so without the legally required fire department report.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Security announced that it has assigned three chief inspectors and two labor inspectors to investigate the fire. In addition, nine suspects, including the manager and owners of the workplace, have been detained as part of the investigation.

The fact that the capitalists regard safety at work as

an unnecessary cost, so they ignore the precautions to be taken during the renovation and put pressure on the workers to finish the work as soon as possible, makes them responsible for this disaster. But it is not only the bosses who are responsible.

The ministry and the municipalities, which have been under the control of the CHP for years, are complicit in this tragedy, as are the ministries that failed to inspect a business located in the center of the city, two floors below ground, and not complying with the regulations on fire precautions, extinguishing systems, emergency evacuation routes, escape stairs and smoke evacuation controls.

Doctor Osman Öztürk, of the Workers' Health and Occupational Medicine Commission of the Istanbul Medical Association, stated, "The fact that the relevant units of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security and the municipalities have not fulfilled their duties of supervision and sanction in the face of these practices, which endanger both the health and safety of workers and the lives of the people around workplace, increases the scale of the incident."

Öztürk added: "Municipalities should regularly inspect workplaces and homes, especially in places like this where there are many people and a high risk of fire. Such inspections should not only be carried out in response to license applications or complaints. Municipalities should carry out these inspections with engineers specializing in fire."

Turkey ranks first in Europe for work-related homicides. According to the February report of the Health and Safety Labour Watch (İSİG), the construction sector, where labor-intensive and precarious work is carried out, leads in terms of fatal accidents. According to the report, at least 144 workers lost their lives in February and an average of five workers lose their lives every day. In its 2023 report, the İSİG said a total of 1,932 workers lost their lives that year, with the construction/roads sector topping the list with 389 fatalities (20 percent of the total) during the year.

The fire in Beşiktaş is one of a number of recent disasters across the world that were entirely foreseeable and preventable, which collectively constitute a searing indictment of capitalism and of the world's ruling elites—including the Lebanese port explosion and fire in 2020 that killed at least 135 workers, the Grenfell

Tower inferno in London in 2017, and the 2013 collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The most striking example of this "profits before lives" policy of the ruling classes around the world is their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because capitalist governments refused to take the necessary public health measures against the pandemic, 28.5 million people died and mass deaths continue.

The way to ensure that workers' health and safety comes before profit is to fight for socialism against capitalism.



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