

# Political prisoners mount hunger strike as state repression grows in Turkey

Hakan Özal  
22 May 2024

Rezan ?engül, Vedat Do?an and Halil Yakut, political prisoners in K?r?ehir High Security Prison in Turkey, went on hunger strike on March 30, April 3 and April 18, demanding an end to isolation and ill-treatment, to be held with other political prisoners and to be transferred to prisons closer to their families.

?engül and Do?an are musicians and members of Grup Yorum, a left-wing music band founded in 1985 and well-known in Turkey and internationally.

On May 12, Yakut’s mother, Gülten Yakut, launched a petition on Change.org calling for her son’s release. She has stated that Yakut was arrested because he was photographed in a “Health for the People” tent set up to help earthquake victims after the 2023 Turkey-Syria earthquake.

Over 53,000 people have officially been killed in Turkey due to the failure of the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an to take action following warnings from scientists and official bodies of major earthquakes in the region.

Pointing to the government’s criminal role in the disaster, Yakut’s mother added, “Those who buried our people in concrete graves in the earthquake are now trying to kill my son, who helped our people during the earthquake, in concrete prison cells for showing solidarity with the earthquake victims.”

Gülten Yakut, whose house in Antakya was destroyed by the earthquake, said her son Halil called her on March 15 and told her that he had been threatened with death: “Today was Halil’s call day. He called me and said that on March 10, the head prison guard threatened him from the window of his cell, saying: ‘There are people here who are serving life sentences. They will kill you, and we won’t do anything against this. We will say that he committed suicide.’”

According to what Halil Yakut told his mother in

another phone call on the 23rd day of his indefinite hunger strike, prison conditions are extremely inhumane. He compared his treatment to that of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps and caged animals in zoos.

He is held in a solitary cell with no sunlight, no ventilation and a small window covered with wire mesh. He is allowed only one hour of exercise a day and has no contact with other political prisoners. Water flows from the fountains only three times a day, and it is muddy and smells bad. Prison management does not provide healthy drinking water to prisoners due to the report issued by the K?r?ehir health director that the water is safe to drink.

Political prisoners are subjected to a severe isolation regime. Prison doors are automatic and the only way to communicate with the guards is through the megaphone at the door. It is forbidden to see a human face and new investigations are constantly being launched for phone calls. Personal belongings are confiscated during cell searches by the guards, and books and letters are denied because they are deemed objectionable. Yakut said that even letters he wanted to send to parliamentary deputies were blocked by the disciplinary board and the letter reading commission.

The prison authorities have illegally criminalized Yakut by telling lawyers, deputies and human rights advocates who try to contact him that he is a “terrorist”, even though there is no court order against him. In his phone call, he explained that he is protesting these unlawful and inhumane actions.

According to the *Halk?n Gücü TV*, the arrests of Yakut and the other political prisoners were justified with an armed attack on the Ça?layan Courthouse in Istanbul on February 6, 2024, the first anniversary of the earthquake disaster.

A civilian who was seriously wounded in the clash that broke out during the attack, claimed by the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (DHKP-C) which is outlawed in Turkey, died in hospital. Three police officers and two other civilians were wounded, and the two perpetrators were killed by police.

The police detained 96 people, including four lawyers, in raids in Istanbul after the armed attack. According to the latest reports, 61 people are still under arrest.

The inhumane conditions faced by thousands of political prisoners in Turkey are imposed following the government's legally baseless and arbitrary arrests of its opponents. This police-state repression has intensified, with violations of freedom of expression, the right to protest and the right to a fair trial all rising.

Following the May Day demonstrations, hundreds of people were detained by police across the country, while 49 people protesting the arbitrary closure of Taksim Square in Istanbul were arrested and sent to prison. Among those arrested were five youth who had earlier protested the government's collaboration with Israel amid the NATO-backed genocide in Gaza.

Last week, in a blatantly political verdict following the "Kobane trial," a court sentenced dozens of Kurdish politicians, including former co-chairs of the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), to a total of 408 years in prison for actions taken fully within their constitutional rights.

On Tuesday, the Istanbul office of sendika.org, a left-wing web site, was raided by police, while 27 more people were detained over May Day protests in Istanbul.

Over 100 journalists, artists, intellectuals and writers have signed a petition demanding the immediate release of those arrested.

The Erdoğan government's escalating police state crackdown is part of an international process. Demonstrators protesting against the Gaza genocide in the US and internationally have been subjected to police attacks for months.

In late April, the NATO-backed fascist Ukrainian regime arrested Bogdan Syrotiuk, a leading member of the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists (YGBL). Bogdan, a socialist opponent of the war, an opponent of the NATO imperialist powers using Ukraine as their proxy, and of the Putin regime, a fighter for the

international unity of the Russian and Ukrainian working class, is being falsely charged by Zelensky's regime as an agent of Russia on the basis of his writings on the *World Socialist Web Site*. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) has launched a global campaign to free him.

The escalation of political repression in Turkey after Erdoğan's meeting with Özgür Özel, leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP), on May 2 must be seen as a serious warning by the working class.

In a statement on X/Twitter, the Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu in Turkey denounced the recent police crackdown, stating:

At the heart of this ruling class consensus, of which the trade union bureaucracy is a part, is the need to intensify the social offensive against the working class and to suppress social opposition from below.

In conditions where, on the one hand, NATO-backed Israel is intensifying the genocide in Gaza and provoking a Middle East-wide war against Iran, and, on the other hand, NATO-backed Ukraine's war with Russia is raising the danger of a nuclear conflict, war abroad is everywhere accompanied by class war and the elimination of democratic rights at home.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**