

Explosion at perfume warehouse in Turkey: 6 workers, including 2 children, killed

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On Saturday morning, November 8, an explosion and fire occurred at a perfume filling depot belonging to the Ravive Cosmetics company in the Dilovas? district of Kocaeli, an industrial city neighbouring Istanbul. When the fire was extinguished, it was discovered that six workers, four women and two children, had been trapped inside and burned to death. Seven people were injured, one seriously.

The explosion, the cause of which has not yet been determined, quickly engulfed the entire building after igniting alcohol-based chemicals stored inside. Residents of the neighbourhood reported that at the moment of the explosion, “the sky was covered in black smoke and screams rose from inside.” The flames were only extinguished after several hours of intervention by the fire department.

This fire disaster in Dilovas? is not merely the result of negligence on the part of a rapacious business or employer. This disaster constitutes an indictment of all capitalist elites and the state, from workplace owners to local authorities, ministries, and the presidency.

The facility has been operating for years without any safety inspections, without a license, and without any protective measures. The building lacked fire escapes, emergency exit doors, and even fire extinguishers. When the only exit door became unusable due to the flames, workers were trapped inside; fire crews had to break down the door with a forklift to reach the bodies. The ventilation system was also inadequate.

One of the most striking aspects of this business-like “death trap” is that it operates right under the nose of government agencies. Ravive Cosmetics’ warehouse was located just a few metres from the ??KUR Dilovas? Service Center, which is responsible for monitoring workplace safety.

Just months earlier, these deadly conditions were brought to the attention of the highest levels of government. A complaint filed with the Presidential Communication Center (C?MER) in December 2024, stated that women and children were being employed at the workplace without insurance, without occupational safety, and under threat of dismissal. The complaint, which was reported in the press, included the following statements:

In the Mimar Sinan neighborhood of Dilovas? district in Kocaeli, there is a perfume manufacturing and bottling facility

without a nameplate where approximately 15 women and children from our neighborhood work. Most of them work without insurance. There is no occupational safety. They exploit women in need by threatening them with dismissal. They are told to “eat your own food” in exchange for 70 lira [less than \$2] as meal allowance. I am reporting this greedy business owner, who exploits the workers and women, to our great state.

Neighbourhood headman Alaattin Durmu? said he had repeatedly appealed to authorities before the warehouse fire, warning them of the danger, but no measures were taken.

Durmu? told media outlets he had filed official complaints with the district governor’s office, the district municipality, and the Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality, stating the building stored chemical substances and posed a significant risk to the neighbourhood: “As the headman, I personally appealed to all the relevant authorities regarding this workplace. This place is like a bomb in the middle of the neighbourhood, with chemical substances coming and going; I said, ‘take precautions,’ but I got no results.” Durmu? said the deaths were entirely “foreseeable.”

Residents say the municipality had previously issued an official demolition order for the building where Ravive Cosmetics operated. However, the order, based on applications that the building was unlicensed and hazardous, was never enforced. Authorities turned a blind eye, knowing that their refusal to act could have deadly consequences.

After disaster struck, these same officials lined up to issue messages of “condolences” and to call for an “investigation,” as they do after every workplace homicide.

Minister of Labor and Social Security Vedat I??khan stated, “Our ministry has appointed chief inspectors, and we are closely monitoring the process.” The ministry announced two chief inspectors and one inspector were appointed, and that seven public officials, including the Kocaeli Provincial Director of the Social Security Institution, the Kocaeli Provincial Director of the Employment Agency, and the Director of the Dilovas? Service Center, had been suspended.

Justice Minister Y?lmaz Tunç stated, “The Gebze Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office has launched a criminal investigation. The necessary measures will be taken against

those responsible.” Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said, “Two provincial inspectors have been assigned to the case, and the necessary administrative procedures are being carried out.” However, as is always the case, such statements conceal the systematic nature of workplace deaths stemming from the capitalist system and seek to reduce responsibility to a few individuals. Countless businesses similar to those where the explosion occurred continue to operate, threatening the lives of countless workers.

The falseness of the government’s statements is evident in its response to those protesting the workplace homicide. In Istanbul’s Kadıköy district, members of the “Youth Committees” protesting the massacre of workers in Dilovası and carrying a banner reading “Cause of Death: Corporate Powers” were detained by police, and four young people were arrested on charges of “inciting the public to hatred and hostility.” Yet none of the officials responsible for this massacre have been arrested.

Dilovası is one of the regions in Turkey where the most brutal consequences of the capitalist profit system for workers are seen. The region is an important industrial centre, with a high concentration of petrochemical factories. These factories are deadly not only for workers but also for neighbourhood residents. The neighbourhood residents refer to the region as the “valley of poison” or the “valley of cancer.”

Sait Akgün, President of the Kocaeli Branch of the Chamber of Environmental Engineers, cited 2017 data, showing the death rate from cancer was 12.5 percent worldwide and 12.9 percent in Turkey, adding: “The rate of deaths from cancer in Dilovası is 33.7 percent. Unfortunately, heavy metals are concentrated in the Dilovası region. This explains the high number of cancer deaths in the region. The cancer death rate among people who have lived in this region for more than 10 years is higher than among those who have lived there for less than 10 years.”

Thousands of workers in Turkey fall victim to “fatal workplace accidents” every year. According to data from the Worker Health and Work Safety Council (İSG), at least 1,737 workers lost their lives in workplace accidents in the first ten months of 2025 alone, including 169 workers in October, seven of whom were children.

According to the Ankara Medical Chamber’s report dated December 2024, “Based on data from the Social Security Institution (SGK) and the Eurostat in 2019, the rate of fatal occupational accidents in Turkey is approximately ten times higher than the European Union (EU) average. Turkey, which has the highest rate of worker deaths in Europe, is among the countries with the highest number of deaths from work accidents.”

Workers who died in Dilovası joined the ranks of countless workers sacrificed in the global slaughterhouse of labour. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that approximately 3 million workers die each year from work-

related injuries and illnesses.

Last month, at least 16 workers lost their lives in a fire at a garment factory in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Around the same time, 16 workers were killed in an explosion at an ammunition factory in the US state of Tennessee.

Last week, a UPS plane crashed into a densely populated industrial area shortly after take-off in Louisville, Kentucky. At least 13 people were killed, including three crew members and a child. The crash occurred in a corridor that includes Ford’s Louisville Assembly Plant and UPS’s massive Worldport air freight hub, as well as dozens of warehouses and other industrial workplaces. A slight deviation in the plane’s course could have resulted in hundreds or even thousands of deaths.

Workers should not accept these deaths and dangerous working conditions and should defend the lives and safety of themselves and their coworkers. However, as decades of experience have shown, the fight against workplace homicides cannot be left to the courts or to the union apparatus, which has become an extension of companies and the state.

In the Soma mine disaster of 2014, in which 301 miners were killed, the owner of the company served just eight days in prison for each worker killed; none of the officials were punished. Last month, a verdict was announced in the case concerning the fire at the Grand Kartal Hotel in the Bolu Kartalkaya Ski Center on January 21, 2025, which killed 78 people and injured 137. The company owners and managers received life sentences, while no government officials were punished.

Workers should take matters into their own hands by forming rank-and-file committees and spearheading independent inquiries. The inquiry launched by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) into the death of 63-year-old machine repairman Ronald Adams Sr., who was crushed to death on April 7, 2025, at the Stellantis Dundee Motor Complex in Michigan, should serve as a guide and be expanded in Turkey and around the world. This struggle must be an integral part of a broader international struggle for socialism, where workers’ lives, safety, and needs come before capitalist private profit and wealth accumulation.



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