Death toll in HABA? steel plant blast in Türkiye rises to 19, one still missing

Ula? Sevinç
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The number of workers killed in the explosion and fire at the HABA? iron and steel plant in Alia?a, Izmir on November 9 has risen to 19. According to a statement from the Health and Safety Labour Watch (?S?G), Abdullah K?l?nç, who was critically injured, died on Wednesday. It was reported that the search for Bar?? Güney, whose name appears on the list of workers who lost their lives, is ongoing, and that no DNA sample matching Güney's was found in the forensic examinations conducted by the Institute of Forensic Medicine.

These preventable deaths have sparked anger and protests across the country. On Tuesday, protests and press statements were held in Alia?a, in Istanbul's ?i?li and Zeytinburnu districts, and in Ankara, Bursa, Ayd?n, Adana and the Edremit district of Bal?kesir. Students at Istanbul University and METU in Ankara also organized protest marches. Mass funerals were held for the dead workers.

The Menemen Chief Public Prosecutor's Office detained 11 people, among them company chairman Mehmet Rü?tü Ba?aran, and halted production at the plant. The plant manager, the steel mill manager, the mechanical maintenance supervisor and the crane maintenance engineer are also among those detained.

The President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an government is presenting the detention of a boss who appears on *Forbes*' list of the richest Turks as proof that justice is being done. But the record of workplace killings in Türkiye shows how wide the gap between detention and punishment is. In Soma, where 301 miners were killed, Soma Holding chairman Alp Gürkan was acquitted. In a compensation case brought by the family of Kadir Özdemir, who fell to his death at HABA? in 2020, the company was found 70 percent primarily at fault, yet no official went to prison. The detentions serve as a maneuver to defuse popular anger and pin responsibility on a handful of individuals.

The accounts of the dead workers' relatives make clear that this massacre was no "accident." Nihat Mara?l?, whose son Ferhat Mara?l? was killed in the explosion, told *BirGün*: "My son was working inside the fire. I told him so many times to quit. He wouldn't. He kept saying, 'I'll quit once my debt is paid off.' He never got out. That's how his debt got paid off."

These words point to the invisible chains that hold numerous workers in deadly jobs: debt, the struggle to make ends meet, low wages and the fear of unemployment.

Another victim, Özcan Efe, 42, left behind a grieving wife and three children. Sami Akar, his childhood friend, attended the funeral and told the newspaper *Ege'de Sonsöz* that Efe was a very honest and decent person. He added: "Because he needed money, he chose to work there, since the pay was a bit better than what's on offer elsewhere. A week ago, he told his older brother, 'The work is too hard, I can't do it, I'm going to quit.' He wanted to hang on a bit longer and use the severance pay from there to buy a small apartment in Menemen."

Some of the dead had only just started working at the plant. Bayram K?nac?, the brother of Abdülkadir K?nac?, said, "He had started this job at the iron and steel plant four days ago." The child of Göksel Ünald? asked: "It was my father's first day on the job; he was cleaning during boiler maintenance. Do you put someone who's been on the job for two hours to work in a place like that?"

?eval Özçelik, the sister of 25-year-old engineer Kadir Kaan Özçelik, said her brother had previously been injured in a workplace accident and that his co-workers had told him, "If you report it as a workplace accident, they'll fire you, they'll come after you." Saying that families were not even told of the deaths until very late, she said, "They didn't tell us my brother was dead until the evening. They tell us, 'Go and find him yourselves.' Is my brother garbage? Why are you throwing him aside like garbage?"

Özçelik added: "I don't know how long my brother has been lying in the morgue, because I don't actually know when he died. Instead of telling us who had died, our esteemed governor drove around in his private car and left, while my brother lay in a body bag. There are a lot of people responsible here. I will not let you rest easy."

The November 9 massacre was the third fatal incident at

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the plant in three weeks. Subcontracted worker Hakan Do?an died at the same plant on October 21, and Eyüp E?inli on November 5. Despite this, the Türk Metal union at the plant did nothing—let alone call for production to be halted until safe working conditions were guaranteed. Including Do?an and E?inli, at least 11 workers were killed at HABA? in the decade preceding November 9.

The daily *Evrensel* has exposed one link in the chain of impunity behind the massacre. On August 8, 2025, the paper ran a front-page report that HABA? had cut workers' wages by 33 percent. Five days later, on the night of August 13, the paper's Izmir bureau in Alsancak was sprayed with gunfire.

According to *Evrensel*'s reporting after the HABA? massacre, one of the people the gunman was in most frequent contact with, according to his phone records, was a member of a family that runs worker shuttle services for HABA?. Yet the prosecutor's office issued a decision of non-prosecution on the criminal complaint against those who instigated the attack. The incident was treated as "damage to property," and the jailed defendant was released at the second hearing.

Fifteen months after that armed attack, at least 19 workers were killed at the same plant because the necessary safety measures were not taken. While those who reported on the unrestrained exploitation at HABA? were threatened with bullets, the corporation and the state apparatus protecting it continued to put workers' lives at risk.

During a visit to the site, Labor Minister Vedat I??khan declared, "No serious problem had previously been identified at the facility, but we have assigned our chief inspector to this accident," implying that neither the company nor the state authorities responsible for inspecting it bore any responsibility. Meanwhile, Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the fascist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) voted down a parliamentary motion to investigate the deaths at HABA?.

The Alia?a Criminal Judgeship of Peace imposed a publication ban on the incident in a ruling that violates the constitutional provisions on freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Yücel Memi? and Sonay Tezcan, spokespersons for the Aegean Workers' Unity, who had called out to workers' relatives in front of the hospital, "Let's not call this fate," were detained on charges of "inciting the public to hatred and hostility."

Türk Metal, the recognized union at the plant, is the largest union in the country and in its sector, with some 300,000 members. Widely regarded as a trusted partner of management and an industrial police force in many major factories, this union apparatus contented itself with a Facebook statement: "We pray for God's mercy upon our laboring brothers who lost their lives in the explosion at the HABA? Iron and Steel plant, extend our condolences and wishes for patience to their families, loved ones and our community, and wish our injured a speedy recovery."

According to 2023 figures from the International Labour Organization, around 330,000 workers worldwide are killed every year directly in "occupational accidents." According to ?S?G data, at least 1,930 workers lost their lives on the job in Türkiye in the first ten months of 2026. In 2025, at least 2,105 workers were killed at work.

An article published in the *International Journal of Engineering Research and Development* in March 2025 examined "accidents that occurred between 2012 and 2022 in five different sectors where occupational accidents are common in Türkiye," and stated that "a comparison was made between Türkiye, the European Union (EU) in general, and some of the EU's developed and developing member countries." It found that "Türkiye loses five times more employees than the average of the 27 EU member countries and ten times more than Germany, a locomotive country with a European Union-based industry."

The deaths at HABA? are part of an unending wave of preventable worker deaths that has continued since the great disaster of 2014 in which 301 miners were killed in Soma. Behind the deadly working conditions imposed on workers by the companies, with the help of the government and the union apparatus, stands the capitalist system, based on private profit and the accumulation of wealth. This underscores that the fight to end workplace killings is fundamentally a question of class struggle and political power.

HABA? workers must take the lead in the fight to win justice for their fallen co-workers by forming a rank-and-file committee, independent of the pro-company union and made up of workers they elect themselves. This committee must conduct its own independent investigation together with engineers, doctors and lawyers whom the workers trust. In this struggle, the allies of the HABA? workers are the workers who stand in solidarity with them in Alia?a, across the country and internationally.

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