



Mr Jean-Claude Juncker
President of the European Commission
president.juncker@ec.europa.eu

Mr Antonio Tajani
President of the European Parliament
president@ep.europa.eu

Mr Donald Tusk
President of the European Council
ec.president@consilium.europa.eu

Ms Federica Mogherini
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Federica.Mogherini@ec.europa.eu

Mr Thorbjørn Jagland
Secretary General of the Council of Europe
private.office@coe.int

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Open Letter - Outcome of the trial against the Turkish doctors' leaders

Dear Presidents, dear High Representative, dear Secretary General,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) and the World Medical Association (WMA) together representing millions of physicians worldwide. We work to safeguard and promote the highest standard of medical ethics and health-related human rights regionally and internationally. We support doctors at risk worldwide.

With this open letter, we wish to share our distress at the outcome of a trial against Turkish doctors' leaders facing prison sentences for defending medical ethics, human rights and peace.

The trial was brought against the members of the Turkish Medical Association's Central Council of 2016-2018 for the publication of a press release entitled 'War is a public health problem' in January 2018. In this statement, the Turkish Medical Association highlights the human, social and environmental cost of war and calls for peace. In response, the Turkish authorities brought criminal charges against the Central Council for 'propagandising for terrorist organisations'. This entailed the temporary detention of said doctors and the present trial. On 3 May 2019, the 32nd Criminal Court of Ankara sentenced the eleven Central Council members to 10 months in prison for the press release 'War is a public health problem', and increased the sentence by an additional 10 months for the publication of another press release entitled 'It is quite possible to live in peace and equality on this land' dating from 2016. One doctor was accused of additional charges resulting in a total sentence of 39 months.

The trial is one of many aggressions by the Turkish authorities the Turkish Medical Association has been subject to in the past years. CPME and WMA have been following the situation throughout and repeatedly confirmed their support to the Turkish Medical Association in its defence of medical ethics and the provision of health-care services accessible to all. The outcome of this trial marks a further escalation of the challenge to these fundamental principles.

The Turkish Medical Association is member of both CPME and WMA. Like our Turkish colleagues, the medical professionals we represent have the duty to denounce violence and warn on the dramatic immediate and long-term health effects of warfare and armed conflicts.

The Turkish Medical Association has done nothing other than express its opinion in support of peace. This is not a criminal offence, but a fundamental freedom enshrined in European and international human rights treaties that Turkey has ratified, hereby committing to protect those rights.

While we will continue the helpful exchange with the EU delegation in Turkey, we see the urgent need for action at highest political level. We therefore appeal to you to make use of all contacts with Turkish authorities to underline the imperative to respect medical ethics and human rights unconditionally.

We trust you share our concern and thank you in advance for your support. The global and European medical community will continue to stand by their Turkish colleagues and defend medical ethics for the benefit of every patient.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Dr Frank Ulrich Montgomery
CPME President



Dr Otmar Kloiber
WMA Secretary General

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The Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) represents national medical associations across Europe.

We are committed to contributing the medical profession's point of view to EU institutions and European policy-making through pro-active cooperation on a wide range of health and healthcare related issues.

The World Medical Association (WMA) is the global federation of National Medical Associations representing the millions of physicians worldwide. Acting on behalf of patients and physicians, the WMA endeavors to achieve the highest possible standards of medical care, ethics, education and health-related human rights for all people.