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Police raids on union offices

Prime Minister,

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents 174 million workers through its 315 affiliates in 156 countries and territories, including Turkey, condemns in the strongest possible terms the raids carried out by the police on the headquarters of two Turkish union organisations, in the early morning of Monday 25 March 2013.

In the aftermath of the bomb attack against the Turkish Ministry of Justice in Ankara on 18 March, the Turkish police went searching for those responsible for it. For no apparent reason, it decided to do so in the headquarters of trade union organisations Genel-Is and Liman-Is. The former is a public sector union which is affiliated to the ITUC-affiliated national union centre DISK as well as to Public Services International (PSI), the latter is a transport workers' union which is affiliated to the ITUC-affiliated national union centre HAK-Is as well as to the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF).

The way in which both raids were carried out was particularly brutal. No questions were asked, no further reason was given than the search for people linked to the bomb attack.

In the case of Liman-Is, the police said it was looking for a former branch president of the union because of his involvement in the bomb attack; as a matter of fact, this person had ceased to be branch president in 1989.

In the case of Genel-Is, the police forced its way into the union premises after having given a couple of names of people it was looking for. None of the people it mentioned is in any way linked to the union.

In both cases, every single office and room in the building was searched. As several of them were locked with their users absent, the police simply smashed the doors and, in a couple of instances, the windows.

Prime Minister, these raids against bona fide trade union organisations are completely unacceptable. The way in which they were carried out proves that their main aim was to intimidate the unions, and to suggest to the public that they were hiding the perpetrators of a bomb attack. This absurd and baseless allegation can in no way be sustained or proven and the ITUC is highly disappointed that the Turkish authorities are becoming ever more ruthless in their attempts to label trade unions as organisations which in one way or another condone, promote or support terrorism. The purpose is clearly to destabilise the unions in an attempt to muzzle all opposition, which is not worthy of a full-fledged democracy like Turkey.

On 10 April, Turkey's national public sector union KESK will be facing judicial proceedings again, in the umpteenth hearing of a politically motivated trial based on the same trumped-up charges of links with terrorist organisations. The ITUC will once again be sending an observer who will be part of a strong international delegation. We would sincerely hope this to be the last time we have to do this.

May we remind you that Turkey is a signatory to the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Conventions 87, on Freedom of Association, and 98, on Collective Bargaining, and that by virtue of their ratification it is bound to ensure that all principles enshrined in them are fully implemented and respected. By violating them through judicial harassment and intimidation, your country is failing its international obligations.

Yours sincerely,



General Secretary

Cc:

- Ambassador Jean-Maurice Ripert, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Turkey
- Ambassador Selim Yenel, Permanent Delegate of Turkey to the EU
- Ambassador Mehmet Hakan Olcay, Turkish Embassy in Brussels
- Umit Deniz Efendioglu, Director, ILO Office, Ankara
- ILO ACTRAV
- Stefan Füller, EU Commissioner for Enlargement
- DISK
- HAK-Is
- TURK-Is
- KESK
- European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)