

Press Release

21 June 2019

Turkey: Start of the Trial against Osman Kavala and 15 Other Members of Civil Society on Monday, 24 June – Federal Government Intervention Required

Amnesty International, the Akademie der Künste, the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels (German Book Trade Association), the Deutsche Journalistinnen- und Journalisten-Union (dju, German Journalists' Union) in ver.di, the KulturForum TürkeiDeutschland, PEN Zentrum Deutschland (German PEN Centre) and Reporter ohne Grenzen (Reporters Without Borders) protest against the continued imprisonment of Turkish human rights activists Osman Kavala and Yiğit Aksakoğlu, demanding their immediate release.

The 61-year-old **Osman Kavala** has been detained in the maximum-security prison in Silivri (Istanbul) since 1 November 2017; **Yiğit Aksakoğlu** has been imprisoned since 18 November 2018. The first 16 months of Kavala's imprisonment and the recorded indictment were admitted by the court on 4 March 2019. The beginning of the trial against 16 accused persons will take place on 24 June 2019 in Silivri prison near Istanbul.

Osman Kavala and his co-defendants are accused of having planned "to overthrow the government or to prevent them from carrying out their responsibilities". This accusation is based primarily on the Gezi Park protests in the summer of 2013 that were allegedly organised by Osman Kavala and the other defendants. These allegations are completely unfounded. The accused are facing life imprisonment.

Kavala's lawyers applied to the Turkish Constitutional Court for the immediate release of their client, as his continued detention on remand violated human rights. On 22 May 2019 the Constitutional Court rejected this motion and ruled that Osman Kavala must remain in prison.

An extensive alliance of civil society organisations in Germany protests against the ongoing imprisonment and demands the immediate and unconditional release of Osman Kavala and his co-defendant Yiğit Aksakoğlu. Their detention while awaiting trial is completely unfounded and has taken on the character of premature sentencing. The groundless charges against Osman Kavala, Yiğit Aksakoğlu and 14 other accused persons must be dropped. The German Federal Government should also advocate for the release of prisoners on all levels and insist that the rule of law in Turkey and human rights be upheld.

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Osman Kavala has dedicated his life to the advancement of civil society and culture in Turkey. In the past 30 years he has supported numerous independent human rights organisations and has co-founded a series of civil society organisations and publishing houses. For example: the **Helsinki Citizens' Assembly** (now called the **Citizens' Assembly**) for the protection of human rights; **Anadolu Kültür**, one of the largest cultural foundations in Turkey to promote cultural understanding; and the **İletişim Yayıncıları** (known as **Contact Publications** in English), which publishes books and specialised literature that frequently deal with subjects considered to be taboo in Turkish society.

The case of Kavala and his co-defendants is only one example of the hard-line approach the Turkish government is taking against its critics: About 1,500 organisations and foundations were closed down during the two-year state of emergency. Peaceful protests continue to be suppressed, and whoever speaks critically about the government must expect the possibility of being arrested; more than 130 media professionals are currently in prison. Nearly 130,000 employees in public service have been arbitrarily dismissed since July 2016, because they are accused of alleged "affiliations to terrorist unions".

The Accused

The start of the trial against Osman Kavala and his co-defendants Gökçe Yılmaz, Ali Hakan Altınay, Hanzade Hikmet Germiyanoğlu, Yiğit Aksakoğlu, Çiğdem Mater Utku, Yiğit Ali Ekmekçi, Mehmet Ali Alabora, Handan Meltem Arıkan, Can Dündar, Ayşe Mücella Yapıçı, Şerafettin Can Atalay, Tayfun Kahraman, İnanç Ekmeçi, Mine Özerden, Ayşe Pınar Alabora is on Monday (24 June) in the courthouse at the maximum-security prison in Silivri. Further trial dates are set in the period from 25–28 June 2019.

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