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9 December 2024

Türkiye: Woman human rights defender Nimet Tanrikulu arrested on baseless charges

On 30 November 2024, the Ankara 4th Criminal Judgeship of Peace ruled for the arrest of woman human rights defender **Nimet Tanrikulu** after she was held for four days in detention. Following the arrest order, she was transferred to Sincan Women's Prison in Ankara. The human rights defender was among the fourteen people who were detained on 26 November 2024 during a mass operation targeting politicians, trade unionists, and human rights defenders.

[Nimet Tanrikulu](#) is a long standing woman human rights defender, feminist, founding member of Human Rights Association and Women for Peace Initiative, and supporter of the group Saturday Mothers. She was arrested during the 1980 military coup in Türkiye and tortured in custody which resulted in injuries that continue to cause health problems for her. The treatment the woman human rights defender endured inspired her to commit her life to the promotion and protection of human rights. This work has led to her being arrested, detained and having faced prosecution numerous times. Nimet Tanrikulu has also been involved in the establishment of several cultural and human rights organisations and in 2005, the Istanbul Medical Chamber honoured her with the Sevinc Özgüner Human Rights, Peace and Democracy Award. She has an MA degree from Bilgi University, with her dissertation focusing on women and peace.

On the morning of 29 November 2024, Nimet Tanrikulu and twelve others including trade unionists, politicians and a lawyer who were also detained, were brought to the Ankara Courthouse for their statements to be taken by the prosecutor. The prosecutor then referred the thirteen people, including the woman human rights defender, to the Ankara 4th Criminal Judgeship of Peace with a request of pre-trial detention for all on the suspicion of membership of a terrorist organisation. The hearing at the Judgeship lasted until 4.00 a.m. of 30 November, with a final decision to arrest and remand nine of the defendants, including the woman human rights defender Nimet Tanrikulu, in pre-trial detention and release four others under judicial control.

On 26 November 2024, a mass arrest operation was conducted by the police in several cities in Türkiye under a secret investigation initiated by the Ankara Prosecutor's Office. The police conducted an early morning raid on the woman human rights defender's house, and after searching the house and confiscating IT equipments, they took Nimet Tanrikulu to Ataköy police station in Istanbul. She was remanded there until the Ankara anti-terror police team arrived and transferred her to the custody of the Ankara Anti-Terror Department who carried out her questioning on 28 November 2024.

The questions directed at the woman human rights defender during this interrogation were based on the unfounded claims of an informant and technical surveillance data relating to the woman human rights defender such as her passport records and her phone historical traffic search (HTS) reports. She was specifically asked why she had travelled to certain countries abroad or certain cities in Türkiye and about the content of her phone communications with particular people who were arrested during the same operation. The questions referred to dates as early as 2008.

In 2012 and 2018, there were two separate investigations concerning Nimet Tanrıkulu relating to similar accusations. In 2012, the investigation conducted by the Diyarbakır Chief Public Prosecutor's Office ended with a decision not to prosecute and in 2023, Diyarbakır High Criminal Court suspended the trial based on the 2018 investigation due to the absence of grounds for prosecution.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned that Nimet Tanrıkulu has been arrested due to her activities related to her peaceful human rights work, such as attending conferences and meetings which date back almost ten years. The organisation reminds the authorities in Türkiye that building a case only on the confessions of secret witness or suspects benefiting from effective remorse law, violates international fair trial standards.

Front Line Defenders call on the authorities in Türkiye to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Nimet Tanrıkulu, as the accusations made against her are related to her peaceful human rights work;
2. Stop using the anti-terror legislation of Türkiye to harass, detain and imprison human rights defenders;
3. Implement the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (EctHR) and stop investigations and prosecutions of human rights defenders solely based on secret witness testimonies;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Türkiye can carry out their activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with Türkiye's international human rights obligations and commitments.