

Case concerning allegations of police torture, ill-treatment and unlawful arrest against lawyer Murat Çelik

Hearing of 26 June 2026, Istanbul

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I. Context

Lawyer Murat Çelik, a former member of the Executive Board of the Istanbul Bar Association and former President of the Istanbul Branch of the Progressive Lawyers' Association (ÇHD), stated that he was subjected to police torture, ill-treatment and unlawful arrest at Galatasaray Square on 8 July 2023. He had been attending the weekly gathering of the [Saturday Mothers/People](#), a movement demanding truth and justice for enforced disappearances in the context of political and police repression. The Saturday Mothers/People are widely known as a movement [inspired](#) by the [Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina](#), who protested against disappearances during the Videla dictatorship.

A criminal case was subsequently initiated against the police officers involved in the incident. According to public reports¹, five police officers are being tried on charges of “exceeding the limits of the use of force” and “intentional injury”, although Çelik and his lawyers have consistently argued that the case should be legally characterised as torture.

The first hearing of the trial took place on 9 October 2025, with broad and effective participation from the legal profession, the Union of Turkish Bar Associations, bar associations and various legal organisations, including ÇHD. At this first hearing, however, the defendant police officers did not attend the court and instead submitted written excuses.

At the following hearing, held on 18 February 2026, it was expected that some of the defendants would attend. The hearing was of particular importance as it concerned the questioning of the accused. The case has attracted significant public and media attention, as it concerns an open allegation of torture during the continuing restrictions imposed on the gatherings of the Saturday Mothers/People, despite [Constitutional Court](#) decisions recognising the unlawfulness of such restrictions.

This case has the characteristics of a symbolic trial for the legal profession, bar associations and the broader struggle for rights in Turkey, particularly with regard to:

¹ See bianet, “Murat Çelik davası: İşkence iddiası ‘yetki aşımı’ sayıldı, sanık polis terfi etti”, 26 June 2026, <https://bianet.org/haber/murat-celik-davasi-iskence-iddiasi-yetki-asimi-sayildi-sanik-polis-terfi-etti-320943>; MLSA, Rabia Çetin, “Avukat Murat Çelik’e işkence davasında geçici hakim beklendi, duruşma 2,5 saat gecikti”, 26 June 2026, <https://www.mlsaturkey.com/tr/avukat-murat-celike-iskence-davasinda-gecici-hakim-beklendi-durusma-2-5-saat-gecikti>

- the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment;
- freedom of assembly and expression;
- the protection, independence and professional immunity of lawyers;
- the prevention of impunity for law enforcement officers.

Developments reflected in the case file between the hearings included the submission of documents concerning requested disciplinary proceedings. It was reported that no disciplinary investigation had been initiated against the police officers involved. Public reports from the 26 June hearing also stated that one of the police officers identified by Çelik as having tortured him had since been promoted.

The third hearing took place on 26 June 2026. The date was particularly significant because 26 June is the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

II. Hearing of 26 June 2026

Courtroom dynamics

There were no significant issues regarding access to the courthouse. Entry and security procedures were fast and fluid.

The hearing began with a considerable delay. Public reports noted that the hearing, scheduled for 10:00, began around 12:30 after the assignment of an interim judge, following a change in the presiding judge. The hearing was also moved to another courtroom due to a technical issue with the SEGBİS audio-visual recording system.

Informally, it was circulated that the newly assigned interim judge required additional time to familiarise herself with the file, which contained extensive documentation submitted by Murat Çelik and his legal team.

Çelik's legal team announced the presence of international observers and thanked them for their solidarity. The judge asked for the names of the observers and their organisations. Given the requests of the Istanbul Bar Association and the Union of Turkish Bar Associations to intervene in the proceedings, they were treated as parties to the case rather than as observers.

The judge appeared attentive to the statements made by Çelik and his legal team. She asked several clarifying questions in a clear and communicative manner, maintained eye contact with the legal team, and there were even one or two moments of humour. The prosecutor took a more passive role and made only limited comments.

Content of the hearing

Murat Çelik explained that he began practising law 36 years ago and that, since then, he has continued to struggle for human rights. He described the treatment he received

from police officers during the Saturday Mothers/People gathering and referred to the assessment of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, whose president was also present at the hearing. According to Çelik, the Foundation's report characterised the treatment he was subjected to as torture.

Çelik stated that he had explicitly identified the police officers responsible for the torture. He specifically pointed to two officers who directly inflicted physical violence on him. One of them, according to Çelik, arrogantly boasted during the incident that he was a "chief commissioner", despite the indictment stating otherwise. A third officer was also identified as the officer who gave the orders.

Çelik underlined the ongoing medical impact of the incident. Three years after the events, he stated that he continues to suffer from serious health problems directly resulting from the torture and that he still requires multiple surgeries.

He also stated that during the Saturday Mothers/People gathering all detained individuals were subjected to torture or ill-treatment. He emphasised that those who identified themselves as lawyers were targeted with particular hostility. According to his statement, the ill-treatment lasted continuously for approximately nine hours. Detainees were kept rear-handcuffed for hours inside unventilated and non-air-conditioned transport vehicles under the intense July heat.

Çelik further described threats and intimidation at the police headquarters. He stated that commanding officers endorsed the violence, mocked him and threatened him with remarks suggesting that the treatment he had received was not even "enough".

Çelik presented the violence inflicted on him not as an isolated incident, but as part of a deliberate and systematic tactic designed to intimidate, deter and negatively affect human rights defenders who struggle against torture.

He also referred to his years of international work on enforced disappearances in custody. He explained that he and his colleagues had travelled internationally to investigate such violations and to share Turkey's experiences with the international community.

While acknowledging that torture has historically existed as a state practice dating back to the Ottoman period, Çelik explicitly linked the modern institutionalisation and systematisation of torture in Turkey to Turkey's integration into NATO. He went on to describe systematic extrajudicial executions carried out in Turkey since the 1990s and referred to concrete cases in which he had been involved. He stated that the Saturday Mothers/People have been searching for their disappeared relatives for years and continue to search for the graves of their children.

A further issue raised during the hearing concerned serious irregularities regarding the recordings of the previous hearing. It was denounced that parts of the SEGBİS recordings had disappeared or were inaudible. Transcripts and audio-visual records

play an essential role in criminal proceedings. The disappearance or loss of recordings damages confidence in the judiciary and raises serious concerns about the integrity of the proceedings. Public reports also noted that a substantial part of the audio recording of the previous hearing was missing or inaudible.

At this point, Murat Çelik's daughter addressed the court. She stated that she had been 16 years old at the time of the events presented before the court and that she had learned about the torture and severe injuries through the media. She described herself as shocked and shattered. She demanded the prevention of impunity and justice for her father. She also expressed that she wanted to believe that this country could be a place where human rights defenders are not targeted or tortured.

Speaking on behalf of the President of the Istanbul Bar Association, Attorney Fatih Arslan formally requested that future hearings be held in a larger and more adequate courtroom. He also insisted that strict administrative and technical measures be taken immediately to prevent any further problems with the SEGBİS recording system.

The prosecutor and the judge appeared to confirm that the irregularities concerning the recordings would be examined and that the relevant authorities in Ankara would be contacted. It was also indicated that the integrity of the recordings of the present hearing would be safeguarded. According to public reports, the court ordered that inquiries be made to the Ministry of Justice Information Technology Department regarding the missing or inaudible SEGBİS records, and that the records be examined and preserved.

The next hearing was scheduled for 9 October 2026.

ELDH's concerns and continued monitoring

ELDH will continue to follow the proceedings closely.

The case raises serious concerns regarding the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, the duty of the state to conduct effective investigations into allegations of torture, and the obligation to ensure accountability where public officials are implicated in serious human rights violations.

ELDH recalls that the prohibition of torture is absolute and non-derogable under international human rights law. Allegations of torture or ill-treatment must be investigated promptly, effectively, independently and impartially. Proceedings must not be reduced to a narrow assessment of excessive force where the nature, context and consequences of the acts alleged point to torture or ill-treatment.

ELDH is also concerned about the specific targeting of lawyers and human rights defenders in the context of peaceful assemblies, including the long-standing gatherings of the Saturday Mothers/People. The independence and safety of lawyers

are essential guarantees for the protection of rights, access to justice and the prevention of impunity.

ELDH will continue to monitor the case and express solidarity with Murat Çelik, his legal team, the Saturday Mothers/People, and all those struggling against torture, enforced disappearances and impunity in Turkey.