UN Working Group finds human rights lawyer Selçuk Kozağaçlı is arbitrarily detained

The UN Experts call for his immediate release, finding his conditional release was denied for exercising his rights and on discriminatory grounds

24 November 2026

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD)has found that **the continued detention of prominent human rights lawyer Selçuk Kozağaçlı in Türkiye is arbitrary**, since he was denied conditional release for which he became eligible in February 2025. The Working Group called for his immediate release.

The Opinion (No.48/2026), adopted on 3 September 2026 and published on 23 November 2026, is based on a joint communication submitted on 2 February 2026 by the Turkey Litigation Support Project (TLSP), together with the European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH), the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), the Law Society of England and Wales (LSEW), and Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L).

The communication focused on the repeated arbitrary denial of Kozağaçlı's conditional release – including his re-arrest on 17 April 2025, just one day after his release from prison. Kozağaçlı, a lawyer at the People's Law Office and honorary President of the Progressive Lawyers' Association (ÇHD), is serving a sentence for 'membership of a terrorist organisation', a conviction stemming from his work as a human rights lawyer.

Examining his detention from the date he became eligible for conditional release, the Working Group has found his continued detention arbitrary in all grounds alleged. **It identified violations concerning the legal basis of detention, fundamental freedoms, procedural safeguards and discrimination.**

In the legal basis for detention, the Working Group found that his release was blocked by a disciplinary sanction he had already served, an unwritten 'sincerity' requirement and a scoring threshold set by the Ministry of Justice rather than by law, and that **the Bakırköy 2nd Enforcement Judgeship reversed its initial release decision within a day without any factual basis**.

The Working Group, highlighting Kozağaçlı's role as a human rights defender, pointed out that his continued detention results from the exercise of his rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association. It held that hunger strikes protesting prison conditions are a form of peaceful protest, and that keeping him in prison for conduct already punished in full serves no legitimate aim**. Making release conditional on remorse or renunciation, it found, forces a prisoner 'to choose between his convictions and his freedom'**, **and requiring him to 'repudiate a lawful association, and the professional acts performed within it', cannot be justified.**

On **procedural safeguards in the decision-making process for conditional release**, the Working Group found **a structural lack of independence** where the prosecution service brings the case, chairs the board assessing the prisoner's conduct and then objects to his release.

The Working Group also found that the conditional-release regime is discriminatory as it requires only those convicted of 'terrorism-related offences' to demonstrate a change of mind. **The Working Group consequently concluded that Kozağaçlı is detained on the basis of his political opinion and his status as a human rights defender**.

The Working Group observed that Kozağaçlı's case was consistent with **a broader pattern of arbitrary detention in Türkiye** and expressed concern that the many cases concerning Türkiye before it may indicate a widespread or systematic practice. In this context, it also recalled States' obligations not to engage in acts that could constitute crimes against humanity, and to prevent and punish them if committed. The Working Group further indicated its interest in conducting a country visit to Türkiye, which would be the first since 2006.

The Working Group called on Türkiye to release Kozağaçlı immediately, provide an enforceable right to compensation and other reparations, and conduct a full and independent investigation, taking measures against those responsible. It also requests follow-up information on legislative, regulatory and practical changes to bring domestic law and practice into conformity with international obligations. The Working Group also requested Kozağaçlı receive the medical treatment he needs in conditions compatible with his dignity.

TLSP, ELDH, IBAHRI, LSEW and L4L call on the Turkish authorities to implement the recommendations of this Opinion without delay, both in the individual case of Selçuk Kozağaçlı and at a systemic level.

TLSP
TURKEY LITIGATION SUPPORT PROJECT

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WITH LAWYERS IN 23 COUNTRIES
European Association of Lawyers for Democracy & Human Rights

INTERNATIONAL BAR ASSOCIATION
Human Rights Institute

The Law Society of England and Wales

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