



**Urgent Action Office** 3-1992 Yonge Street Toronto ON M4S 1Z7 Phone: (416) 363-9933 Fax: (416) 363-3103 [urgentaction@amnesty.ca](mailto:urgentaction@amnesty.ca)  
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## **TURKEY END PROTEST BAN ON GALATASARAY SQUARE**

Saturday Mothers/People, a group of relatives of victims of enforced disappearances and other human rights defenders are prevented from exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly in Istanbul's Galatasaray Square every Saturday. This venue is a place of symbolic importance to the group. In recent weeks, riot police have again used unnecessary force during detention of the rights defenders and widened their security perimeter preventing independent observation by journalists and civil society organizations.

### **Write to the Minister of Interior urging him to:**

- Ensure that police allow Saturday Mothers/People and other peaceful protesters to gather on Galatasaray Square.
- Guarantee that the police protect peaceful protestors so that they can exercise their right to freedom of peaceful assembly without fear of being subject to excessive use of force, arbitrary arrest and detention.
- Instruct the Beyoğlu governor to lift the ban and refrain from imposing new bans on assemblies in Galatasaray Square, in line with the rulings of the Constitutional Court.

### **Write to:**

Minister of Interior  
Ali Yerlikaya  
T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı, Bakanlıklar  
Ankara/Türkiye  
Email: [ozelkalem@icisleri.gov.tr](mailto:ozelkalem@icisleri.gov.tr)  
*Salutation: Dear Minister,*

### **And copy:**

Her Excellency Esra DEMİR  
Ambassador  
Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye  
197 Wurtemberg Street  
Ottawa, ON K1N 8L9  
Tel: (613) 244-2470 Fax: (613) 789-3442  
Email: [embassy.ottawa@mfa.gov.tr](mailto:embassy.ottawa@mfa.gov.tr)

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

For the past 28 years, the Saturday Mothers/People have tirelessly sought truth and justice for their loved ones who were forcibly disappeared in police custody in the 1980s and 1990s. Saturday Mothers/People began holding a peaceful weekly vigil in Galatasaray Square in central Istanbul in May 1995 demanding that the authorities account for the fate of their loved ones. Despite being arbitrarily

arrested and detained every week, they continued to gather in the square until March 1999 when they faced heavy-handed police repression with the aim of preventing the peaceful protests from taking place. After a gap of ten years and because there was no progress in their quest for truth and justice for their disappeared relatives, the group returned to Galatasaray Square in January 2009.

Time and again, the Saturday Mothers/People have been met with brutal crackdowns and even prosecutions for taking part in peaceful vigils. Turkish authorities have never provided a valid justification for their unlawful denial of the right to exercise freedom of expression and assembly. In August 2018, riot police used tear gas and water cannons as well as excessive force to disperse the hundreds of people who had peacefully gathered to mark the 700th weekly vigil. The justification for the intervention was a banning order by the Beyoğlu district governor on the grounds that the Square was not a designated location for assemblies and that they had not been notified of the assembly. 47 people were detained using excessive force. 46 of those were indicted in 2021 and are still facing the charges of *'refusing to disperse despite warnings.'* Their prosecution continues.

The repeated arbitrary arrests and detention of the Saturday Mothers/People each week is a new violation of their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly under Türkiye's Constitution, as established in the Maside Ocak (No. 2019/21721) and Gülseren Yoleri (No. 2020/7092) rulings, and Articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Articles 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which Türkiye is a party to. These arbitrary arrests and detention are also a violation of the right to liberty and security of person, which is protected by Article 9 of the ICCPR.

Since August 2018, armed riot police have been continuously stationed in Galatasaray Square, blockading all access and preventing peaceful protesters from assembling. Saturday Mothers/People are told by police each week that the district governorate's ban is in force and that their assembly is 'unauthorized', in contravention of the two Constitutional Court rulings handed down in November 2022 and March 2023.