



Urgent Action Office 3-1992 Yonge Street Toronto ON M4S 1Z7 Phone: (416) 363-9933 Fax: (416) 363-3103 urgentaction@amnesty.ca
Third UA: 101/23 Index: EUR 44/9418/2025 Türkiye of May 24, 2025

TÜRKİYE

OPEN GALATASARAY SQUARE FOR PROTESTERS

On March 14, 2025, a court in Türkiye acquitted 45 people of charges related to a peaceful protest in 2018. The group included relatives of victims of enforced disappearances who had been prosecuted under the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations (Law No. 2911). They were accused of joining an unauthorized gathering and refusing to disperse, despite not posing any threat.

The charges stemmed from their participation in the 700th weekly vigil held by the Saturday Mothers/People in Galatasaray Square—an event disrupted by police and followed by arrests.

The acquittals came after two rulings by Türkiye's Constitutional Court, in 2022 and 2023, which found that the group's right to peaceful assembly had been violated.

It is now time to fully reopen Galatasaray Square and allow the Saturday Mothers/People to resume their weekly peaceful vigils without unlawful interference.

Write to the Minister of Interior urging him to:

- Ensure the Saturday Mothers/People's right to peaceful assembly is fully respected.
- Reopen Galatasaray Square to the public.
- Immediately lift all current restrictions on access to the Square.

Write to:

Minister of Interior

Ali Yerlikaya

Email: ozelkalem@icisleri.gov.tr or diab@icisleri.gov.tr

Salutation: Dear Minister,

And copy:

His Excellency Can Dizdar

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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For nearly 30 years, the Saturday Mothers/People have been calling for answers about the fate of their loved ones who were forcibly disappeared in police custody in Türkiye during the 1980s and 1990s. Since May 1995, the group has held peaceful weekly vigils in Galatasaray Square in central Istanbul. They have demanded accountability from the authorities, even in the face of repeated detentions.

In March 1999, police pressure forced them to pause the vigils. After a ten-year break—and no progress on their demands—they resumed the gatherings in January 2009. Over the years, the Saturday Mothers/People have regularly faced police violence and arrests. In some cases, they were even prosecuted for simply exercising their rights to peaceful assembly and free expression—rights that Turkish authorities have often failed to protect.

One of the most serious crackdowns took place on August 25, 2018, during the group's 700th vigil. Riot police used tear gas, water cannons, and force to break up the peaceful protest. Authorities cited a ban issued by the local governor. Forty-seven people were detained. In 2021, 46 of them were put on trial for "refusing to disperse despite warnings." On March 14, 2025, the court acquitted 45 people. The case of one individual was separated due to a procedural delay.

Türkiye's Constitutional Court issued two important rulings in November 2022 and March 2023. Both confirmed that the group's right to peaceful assembly had been violated. The Court also ordered the authorities to prevent such violations in the future.

With this legal backing, the group resumed its vigils between April and November 2023. Still, they continued to face detentions and police violence, including treatment that may amount to torture or other ill-treatment. In August 2023, another group of 20 people—including relatives of the disappeared and human rights defenders—was detained during the June 10 vigil. They were later acquitted in 2024.

On November 8, 2023, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya responded to a parliamentary question by acknowledging the group's victimization. He said, "We will find a solution as soon as possible." That same week, for the first time in months, no detentions took place.

Since then, a small vigil involving 10 relatives has been allowed near Galatasaray Square. This limited arrangement is still in place. The Saturday Mothers/People are preparing to mark the 30th anniversary of their struggle on May 27, 2025.

Please take action as soon as possible until November 10, 2025. The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.