

# URGENT ACTION

## ISTANBUL VIGILS MUST BE ALLOWED TO TAKE PLACE

**On 25 August, police in Istanbul used unnecessary and excessive force to disperse people taking part in a longstanding weekly peaceful vigil. The authorities must ensure that future vigils, including the next one planned for 1 September, are allowed to take place.**

On 25 August, police in Istanbul used unnecessary and excessive force, including tear gas, plastic bullets and water cannons, to disperse participants of a weekly vigil- known as the 'Saturday Mothers vigil'- held for victims of enforced disappearance. The longstanding protest was marking its 700<sup>th</sup> week since it was first held in 1995. Scores of participants, including elderly relatives of people who were forcibly disappeared, were ill-treated and 47 people were detained before being released from police custody later that day.

When the vigil participants met on 25 August, the police approached organisers telling them to disperse as the gathering had been banned by the district governor, an office which falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. When participants refused, the police used tear gas, water cannons and plastic bullets to disperse the crowd. People detained were held handcuffed in the police buses for at least seven hours before finally going through the required medical checks and transferred to Istanbul Security Directorate, the main police headquarters, to have their statements taken. So far, 12 of those detained have approached local NGO Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TIHV) to have their injuries documented by independent doctors. TIHV doctors told Amnesty International that one participant had a broken finger and another a broken wrist. Bruises sustained by all 12 vigil participants were consistent with their statements of being beaten and handcuffed for a lengthy period of time. According to their lawyer, once they obtain the necessary medical reports, those who sustained injuries will lodge criminal complaints against the police officers for the abuse they suffered.

Statements by the Minister of Interior on 27 August suggest that a ban on the weekly vigil may be imposed in the future. The relatives of people forcibly disappeared and their supporters must be allowed to gather and exercise their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly guaranteed under domestic and international law.

### 1) TAKE ACTION

**Write a letter, send an email, call, fax or tweet:**

- The Ministry of Interior to ensure that future planned vigils can go ahead without any unlawful restrictions and that vigil participants can exercise their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly;
- The Ministry of Justice to conduct a prompt, impartial, independent and effective investigation into allegations of unnecessary and excessive use of force and ill-treatment committed by police officers on 25 August against vigil participants and bring all those found to be responsible to justice in proceedings that meet fair trial standards.

**Contact these two officials by 10 October 2018:**

Minister of Interior

Mr. Süleyman Soylu

İçişleri Bakanlığı

Bakanlıklar

Ankara, Turkey

Fax: +90 312 418 1795

Salutation: Dear Minister

Ambassador Serdar Kılıç, Embassy of the Republic of Turkey

2525 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington DC 20008

Phone: 1 202 612 6700 OR 202 612 6701

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Email: [embassy.washingtondc@mfa.gov.tr](mailto:embassy.washingtondc@mfa.gov.tr)

Contact Form: <http://washington.emb.mfa.gov.tr/Mission/Contact>

Twitter: [@SerdarKilic9](https://twitter.com/SerdarKilic9) [@TurkishEmbassy](https://twitter.com/TurkishEmbassy)

Salutation: Dear Ambassador

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INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The longstanding peaceful vigil known as the 'Saturday Mothers' vigil first started as a response to the hundreds of reported cases of enforced disappearances during the 1980s and 1990s by relatives of people who were forcibly disappeared and to protest against the prevalent impunity for grave human rights violations of the day. The exact circumstances of the disappearances in the vast majority of cases are still unknown, including the fate and whereabouts of hundreds of victims, and those responsible have not been brought to justice.

Saturday Mothers have held 699 peaceful gatherings since May 1995. During this time, many participants have faced intimidation, harassment, excessive use of force, arbitrary detention and unjust prosecution. In 1999, as a result, the organizers decided to stop holding the weekly vigils, which resumed in 2009 to continue with their demand of truth, justice and reparations for all cases of enforced disappearance.

Torture and other ill-treatment is absolutely prohibited in both domestic and international law. Turkish authorities must promptly investigate the allegations of unnecessary and excessive use of force and ill-treatment committed by police officers against participants of the Saturday Mothers vigil on 25 August 2018. All those suspected of criminal responsibility must be brought to justice in fair trials.

Name:  
Gender m/f: all

UA: 162/18 Index: EUR 44/9012/2018 Issue Date: 29 August 2018