Turkey’s shocking Pride March trial: The story so far

Blog, Civil Rights and Freedom, Freedom of Assembly, Pride, Turkey

> 18 students and one academic face up to three years imprisonment in Turkey, should a judgement be made against them on December 10. The charges? Participating in a Pride march. Here’s the story so far, and how you can stand up for the METU 19.

In May 2019, 19 LGBTI rights defenders were detained while gathering for a Pride march at the Middle East Technical University (METU) in the Turkish city of Ankara. The city’s governor had placed an indefinite ban on LGBTI+ public events in November 2017, under the state of emergency, which was then lifted by the Ankara court earlier in the year, months before the METU Pride march. Despite this, the METU administration still banned Pride.

Because the university administration’s decision contravened the Ankara court’s ruling, activists and students exercised their legal and human right to freedom of assembly and gathered to proceed with their annual peaceful march. The university administration then contacted the police and asked them to intervene.

Arriving at the campus, Police used excessive force to disperse the students after the peaceful Pride march began. Tear gas and plastic bullets were fired at the crowd, students were dragged across the ground, pushed up against trees and sustained head injuries, and 23 people were detained and prosecuted. After several postponements, on 10 December, 2020, which also happens to be International Human Rights Day, 19 of the detained people will face judgement, and up to three years in prison if they are not acquitted.

Gathering for a Pride march is a human right. According to Article 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others.” Turkey is signatory of the convention.

What are the charges?

Participating in “unlawful assembly” (a peaceful Pride March) at the Middle East Technical University (METU) in 2019, and “resisting despite warning”. One student was also charged with insulting a police officer. The prosecution office claims that the police used proportional force, however, police violence was documented in eyewitness reports and video footage. None of the police officers seen using excessive force at the event have been charged.

> Turkey must ensure the right to freedom of assembly for all its citizens, and acquit the 19 @ODTULGBTI Pride activists on 10 December.
>
> Join their campaign! ? Share our video & film your own about what Pride means to you ????
> #BenimOnurYürüyü?üm & #ODTÜRengineKavu?sun pic.twitter.com/HJArBWTvh1
>
> — ILGA-Europe (@ILGAEurope) December 2, 2020

Ahead of the trial, have a look at the timeline of events and join us in showing solidarity with the METU 19.

1996:

Students at METU formed a group to ensure a safe space for LGBTI+ people at the university.

2011:

The first METU Pride was celebrated.

November 2017:

A blanket indefinite ban on public events focused on LGBTI+ rights was issued in Ankara, using the state of emergency powers. Despite the ending of emergency rule in July 2018, the Ankara Governor's office did not lift the ban until two years later.

21 February 2019:

Ankara's 12th Administrative Court lifted the blanket ban on LGBTI events in the city.

6 May 2019:

The METU University Rector, Mustafa Ver?an Kök, sent an email to all students, graduates, and faculty members, informing them that the Rectorate was prohibiting Pride events.

10 May 2019:

The METU Pride march went ahead, in accordance with the Ankara Court's lifting of the ban. 22 people - 21 students and one professor — were detained after police forces entered the campus at the request of the university administration. Police dispersed the crowd using pepper spray, tear gas and plastic bullets. All 22 detainees were released later that day.

2 August 2019:

19 of the 22 detained LGBTI+ rights defenders were notified that a criminal case had been opened against them, related to the charges of "participating in an unlawful assembly" and "resisting despite warning", under Article 2911 of the Turkish Penal Code.

12 November 2019:

The first hearing of the court case took place. The judgement was postponed until 12 March, 2020.

12 March 2020:

The judgement was again postponed until 10 July, 2020.

24 June 2020:

An Ankara administrative court annulled the university's ban on 2019 METU Pride March.

12 July 2020:

The judgement was pushed back again, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

10 December 2020:

The trial is scheduled for the 19 LGBTI activists.

Join our campaign!

Here is how you can join the campaign to show your support for the METU 19 and for freedom of assembly in Turkey and everywhere. Film a video of yourself saying what Pride means to you and share on your social media accounts using the hashtags #BenimOnurYürüyü?üm and #ODTÜRengineKavu?sun