

Turkey: 19 LGBTI Pride marchers must be acquitted in forthcoming trial

[Press Release](#), [Civil Rights and Freedom](#), [Freedom of Assembly](#), [Pride](#), [Turkey](#)

Turkey must uphold its domestic and international commitments, and dismiss all charges against 19 human rights defenders, prosecuted for their participation in a peaceful Pride march at Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara in May 2019, says Europe’s largest LGBTI rights umbrella organisation, ILGA-Europe.

On December 10, International Human Rights Day, 18 students and one academic, who were detained, charged and prosecuted for their participation in a peaceful LGBTI Pride march at Turkey’s Middle East Technical University (METU), will come to trial. Although they were exercising their right to freedom of assembly, the 19 human rights defenders face charges of “participating in an unlawful assembly” and “failing to disperse despite being warned”. If found guilty, they could face up to three years in prison.

METU Pride had peacefully taken place in the city of Ankara every year since 2011. However, on 10 May 2019, a few days before the annual event, the administration of METU said it could not go ahead. Ankara had banned all LGBTI+ activities under a state of emergency in 2017, but this ban had been lifted earlier in 2019. There was no legal basis for METU’s administration to ban the march, so activists and students got together and exercised their legal right to freedom of assembly, celebrating LGBTI Pride. The administration then called the police, who used excessive force to disperse the march. Tear gas and plastic bullets were fired at the crowd, students were dragged across the ground, pushed up against trees and sustained head injuries.

22 METU Pride participants were detained, 19 of whom were subsequently charged. The first hearing of the court case took place in November 2019, but a judgement has been postponed several times, due to COVID-19 pandemic measures.

Says Turkish NGO, ÜniKuir: “We do not accept the prohibition, marginalisation or prosecution of the METU Pride march or any Pride march. We have to speak out against this injustice and we ask you to speak out with us.”

LGBTI rights have been systematically attacked in Turkey and any outcome other than the acquittal of the METU Pride human rights defenders goes against Turkey’s own legislation and the European Convention of Human Rights, of which Turkey is signatory.

According to activists from METU LGBTI+ Solidarity: “Turkey is ignoring the international treaties that they are a party to and violate our basic human rights, on Human Rights Day. We are standing with all of our colours against this injustice.”

Katrin Hugendubel, Advocacy Director for ILGA-Europe says: “It is incredibly important that Turkey upholds its international and domestic human rights commitments by acquitting the METU Pride LGBTI activists on 10 December. Anything else would be a slap in the face for human rights and the decision of the Ankara Administrative Court to lift the ban. All Turkish citizens should enjoy the right to freedom of assembly, and this judgement will set a precedent for forthcoming similar trials in Turkey.”

Further information:

- Read our joint statement with 8 international human rights organisations [here](#), and download it in [English](#) and [Turkish](#).
- [Timeline](#) of the story so far.

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