Joint statement

To Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu

To Minister of Interior of the Republic of Turkey, Sebahattin Oztürk

July 23, 2015

Dear Excellences,

We write to you to express our grave concern about the lack of a political response from you over recent attacks, discriminatory treatment and incitement to violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people in Turkey. In particular, we denounce the ill-treatment Kemal Ördek, co-founder of the Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association (Kırmızı Şemsiye) and previous TGEU co-chair, suffered at the Esat Police Station (ANKARA) on Sunday, July 5, 2015. When seeking protection from a brutal attack of sexual assault, theft, threats and insults police officers insulted and threatened Kemal Ördek and his lawyer, failed to stop further abuse by the perpetrators and tried to prevent him from filing a complaint. While the perpetrators can walk free now, Kemal Ördek has to hide from their harassment that continues.

We are concerned over the apparent lack of effective investigation and shocked by the demonstrated disrespect and dehumanizing attitude of law enforcement officials. The attack as well as the disregard for the rule of law, human rights and equality demonstrated by the police officers is not a singular incident but an expression of a climate of increasing hostility against LGBT people, sex workers and other minorities in Turkey. On 28 June the peaceful LGBT pride demonstration in Istanbul was attacked by police forces, a poster campaign in Ankara calls for the murder of gay men. For years Turkey leads in Europe over reported murders of trans people and particularly trans sex workers in TGEU’s Trans Murder Monitoring Project. Both Commissioners for Human Rights of the United Nations1 and the Council of Europe2 have expressed recently their grave concern. Still, there is no visible response from state authorities to stop the widespread transphobia and hatred against sex workers.

The Constitutional Code, Turkey’s commitments under the European Convention on Human Rights and the accession to the European Union demand the respect for the rule of law and human rights for all persons. It is an essential obligation for the police to secure rights for all inhabitants and to investigate without bias. No cultural, religious or other argument can be invoked to justify a violation of these rights on grounds of gender

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identity or sex work status. In light of systematic violence and exclusion the silence from the political leadership is pouring oil on the fire. The Council of Europe’s LGBT-Recommendations (2010)5 and the Istanbul Convention provide important tools on how to end homo- and transphobia as well as gender-based violence in your country. It is now on you to urgently demonstrate political leadership to instigate legal reform, raise positive awareness to improve the living situation of trans people in Turkey and bring justice to Kemal Ördek.

We ask you to take immediate steps to ensure Kemal Ördek’s safety, to do what is in your power to stop the continuing harassment and threats, and to swiftly bring the perpetrators to justice.

The behaviour of the police officers from the Esat Police Station needs prompt and full investigation. Those responsible, including those who allowed the abuse to happen, need to be brought to justice.

We call upon you swiftly to instigate a comprehensive and systematic response to ensure the respect for the rule of law and basic human rights of trans people and sex workers. Training programs for police forces need to aim at ending discrimination and abuse against trans people and sex workers.

We will follow the investigation process as well as whether Kemal Ördek will be effectively protected against the threats.

Signatories

IGLYO – International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Youth and Student Organisation

ILGA-Europe – European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association

ICRSE – International Committee for the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe

SWAN – Sex Workers’ Rights Advocacy Network

TGEU – Transgender Europe