



Amsterdam, July 16, 2026

To the kind attention of:

Mr. Volker Türk

High Commissioner for Human Rights

Urgent appeal: Mass arrest of 968 persons on July 13, 2026 (accused to be the member of Gülen Movement)

Dear Mr. Türk,

Stichting Justice Square¹ writes this letter to call on you to take strong action to stop the arbitrary and unlawful mass detentions and arrests of real or alleged members of the Hizmet/Gülen Movement. The Turkish Government has pursued this policy of persecution for ten years through mass arrests, detentions, and unjust prosecutions of Gülen Movement members under an abusive interpretation and implementation of anti-terrorism legislation, which the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has indicated on many occasions may constitute crimes against humanity.

It is also well known to you that human rights violations against dissidents in Türkiye, particularly members of the Gülen Movement, have intensified since the coup attempt of 15 July 2016, for which the Government baselessly blamed the Gülen Movement while also declaring it a terrorist organization. This designation has never been accepted by any international organization or democratic country. However, the mass detentions and incidents of torture that began immediately after the coup attempt, together with the Emergency Statutory Decrees (OHAL Decrees) issued to shield those responsible for these violations from criminal accountability, have irreparably damaged the rule of law in Türkiye over the past ten years. This campaign of mass investigations, detentions, and arrests has, over time, turned into a witch hunt against the Gülen Movement and has continued to the present day.

The information shared by the Turkish Minister of Justice, Akın Gürlek, on X on 13 July 2026 clearly demonstrates that the practices of enemy criminal law, which have become state policy against these individuals, are continuing. The scale of the repression is captured, first of all, in the state's own figures. According to the Minister of Justice, **judicial proceedings were initiated against 720,338 people between July 2016 and July 2026** in connection with the Gülen Movement alone, and 127,102 people were convicted. The state news agency (AA) itself reported on the ninth anniversary (2025) of the coup attempt that 390,354 people had been

1 <https://justicesquare.org/>

detained and 113,837 arrested in Gülen-related investigations over nine years. These numbers have continued to climb. In 2025, at least 4,256 individuals were detained in operations targeting alleged members of the Gülen Movement. **During the first six months of 2026 alone, a further 3,419 individuals were detained** through coordinated, multi-province operations. Moreover, more than 130,000 public officials—teachers, doctors, judges, prosecutors, police officers, academics, soldiers, and civil servants—were summarily dismissed by decree on the basis of lists prepared in advance, without individualized reasoning, evidence, or any opportunity to be heard.

These figures reveal that large-scale detention operations remain an integral feature of state policy even a decade later. Their scale, frequency, and nationwide character provide compelling evidence of the continued implementation of a systematic enforcement campaign that is incompatible with the principles of individualized suspicion, proportionality, legal certainty, and the rule of law under international human rights law.

The characterization of operations targeting alleged members of the Gülen Movement as a "*great state purification*" (büyük devlet arınması) by the Minister of Justice, Akın Gürlek, in an interview with the *Sabah* newspaper on 12 July 2026² and in a subsequent post on the social media platform X on 13 July 2026 provides a striking example of the institutionalization of hate-based official discourse. Minister Akın Gürlek reiterates the Government's unlawful policy at every opportunity by posting messages using highly abusive and dehumanizing language, portraying members or supporters of the Gülen Movement as traitors and the most dangerous terrorists who must be eliminated.³

As Stichting Justice Square, we have published urgent appeal letters on several occasions to draw your attention to these mass detentions, inviting you to contact the Turkish authorities to ensure respect for the rule of law in Türkiye. However, investigations and mass detentions targeting members of the Gülen Movement continue unabated. The accusations against those detained in these operations concern routine lawful activities that lack the element of force or violence required for membership in a terrorist organization.

In *Yasak v. Türkiye* [GC], the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights held that the criminal intent (*mens rea*) required for membership in an armed terrorist organization cannot be retroactively inferred from routine and entirely lawful past activities carried out within a civic or social group that was only subsequently characterized as a terrorist organization. Through this landmark ruling, the Grand Chamber explained in explicit and compelling terms the substantive criteria that domestic courts must establish under Article 7 in order to satisfy the mental element required for this offence.⁴

² <https://www.sabah.com.tr/trend/galeri/gundem/son-dakika-sinsi-ahtapotun-yeni-oyunu-desifre-oldu-adalet-bakani-akin-gurlek-sabaha-konustu-son-kripto-temizlenene-kadar-surecek>

³ <https://x.com/abakingurlek/status/2076547344137322749?s=20>

⁴ <https://strasbourgobservers.com/2026/06/23/broadening-the-ylcinkaya-precedent-the-grand-chamber-judgment-in-yasak-v-turkiye/>

The allegations therefore have no legal basis, and the principles established in the ECtHR's *Yalçınkaya* and *Yasak* judgments continue to be ignored. Instead, operations targeting the Gülen Movement continue, and thousands of people are detained in these operations.

In short, the large-scale operations against members of the Gülen Movement, accompanied by mass arbitrary imprisonment, persecution, and other gross human rights violations carried out pursuant to Government policy, have reached the threshold of crimes against humanity. Notwithstanding the opinions of United Nations treaty bodies and special procedures, together with the European Court of Human Rights' recent Grand Chamber judgments concluding that these individuals had been prosecuted and convicted solely for lawful conduct, the Turkish authorities have persisted in the same course of action. This continued disregard for authoritative international human rights findings demonstrates the Government's entrenched policy of repression.

In line with the duties and values outlined in our founding document, Stichting Justice Square respectfully draws your attention to the severe human rights violations in Türkiye described above and urges you to take strong action on this matter.

To this end, we kindly invite you to:

- a. Contact the relevant Turkish authorities regarding the recent mass arrests and detentions;
- b. Request information on the charges and measures taken in these operations;
- c. Urgently request information from the Turkish authorities regarding the physical and mental health conditions of the detained individuals; and
- d. Call upon the Turkish authorities to end this brutal persecution and the unlawful and arbitrary arrests and detentions.

Sincerely yours,

**Chairman of the Board of
Directors
Stichting Justice Square**

Also sent to:

Mr. Ben SAUL

Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism

Ms. Alice Jill EDWARDS

Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Ms. Ana BRIAN NOUGRERES

Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy

Ms. Gina ROMERO

Special Rapporteur on The Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association

Ms. Irene KHAN

Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Ms. Margaret Satterthwaite

Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers

Mr. Alain Berset

Secretary General, Council of Europe

Mr. Dr. Matthew Gillett

Chair of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

Mr. Michael O' Flaherty

Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe