

OPEN LETTER

President of the Republic of Turkey, Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (contact@tccb.gov.tr)
Minister of Justice, Mr. Yılmaz Tunç (info@adalet.gov.tr)
Minister of Health, Mr. Fahrettin Koca (sabim@saglik.gov.tr; disabgm@saglik.gov.tr)
Minister of Interior, Mr. Ali Yerlikaya (diab@icisleri.gov.tr; sti@icisleri.gov.tr)

21 December 2023

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you on behalf of the World Medical Association (WMA), the global federation of National Medical Associations representing millions of physicians worldwide. The WMA plays a key role in promoting good practice, medical ethics and medical accountability internationally.

We would like to draw your attention once again to the situation of Dr. Ayşe Uğurlu, who continues to face administrative harassment, following her participation in a press conference held at the Ankara Medical Chamber on 22 August 2020 to recall the ethical norms of the medical profession related to the treatment of prisoners.

We welcomed the decision of the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office last September to dismiss the criminal investigation relating to the charges of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" on the grounds of insufficient evidence. Following this decision, we expected that the disciplinary investigation against Dr. Uğurlu would be dropped. According to our sources however, the Ministry of Health High Disciplinary Board considered recently that there were substantial shortcomings in the investigatory report and decided to pursue the investigation. As a result, Dr. Ayşe Uğurlu is still facing the risk of indefinite dismissal from public service.

The continuation of the disciplinary investigation against Dr Ayşe Uğurlu is part of a well-known pattern of harassment against physicians who defend human rights and the ethical values of the profession. This harsh pressure exerted on physicians by the Turkish authorities constitutes a clear abuse of authority, unworthy of a State governed by the rule of law.

International ethical standards¹ require that the physician treat prisoners with dignity, respect their autonomy, prevent coercion or any other practices amounting to ill-treatments or torture and protest if it occurs. By calling for the respect of those fundamental principles, Dr Uğurlu has acted in conformity with the ethical values of our profession.

¹ [WMA Declaration of Malta on Hunger Strikers](#); [WMA Statement on the Responsibility of Physicians in the Documentation and Denunciation of Acts of Torture or Cruel or Inhuman or Degrading Treatment](#); [WMA Declaration of Hamburg concerning Support for Medical Doctors Refusing to Participate in, or to Condone, the Use of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment](#)

Turkey ratified the International Covenants on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), thereby committing itself to respect, protect and fulfil fundamental human rights, including the right to health and to a fair trial.

We therefore urge the Turkish authorities to immediately and unconditionally put an end to the disciplinary investigation against Dr. Ayşe Uğurlu, for respecting the requirements of the medical profession and defending human rights.

We also demand that the Turkish authorities put a stop once and for all to the ongoing harassment of physicians due to their work in the field of human rights and provide them with adequate working conditions so that they can practice safely in compliance with the ethical standards of their profession.

Your sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lujain', with a large, sweeping flourish extending upwards and to the right.

Dr Lujain Al-Qodmani,
President of the World Medical Association