
Solidarity with Turkish trade unions
Request for expedited appeal
4 April 2010

TUC backs Turkish woman trade unionist Sheher Tumer

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber has written to Turkey's Ambassador to the UK in solidarity with Turkish trade union confederation KESK, who are campaigning for jailed health and social service workers union activist Sheher Tumer.

She has been jailed for over seven years for alleged membership of an illegal armed organisation, and for 'making propaganda'. But KESK maintain she has been jailed for her trade union activities, for celebrating the Kurdish New Year and International Women's Day, and for publicising the deaths of babies at a training hospital.

Brendan Barber's letter follows:

Dear Ambassador

Urgent appeal hearing needed for Sheher Tümer

The Trades Union Congress, the national voice for people at work in Britain, urges you to convey to your government our serious concerns about the continued detention of Sheher Tümer, member of the executive board of KESK's Health and Social Service Workers Union (SES) in Ankara. In solidarity with our colleagues in KESK, we would urge that the Turkish government expedite the appeal which has been lodged with the Supreme Court.

We understand that Seher Tümer was detained in her workplace, Ankara Zekai Tahir Burak Women's Health Training and Research Hospital on 17 April 2009, and was arrested by the 11th Heavy Penalty Court in Ankara on 20 April 2009. We understand that the charges against her relate to participation in the traditional Newroz festival in Ankara on 22 March 2009 and the 2009 International Women's Day, as well as her publications, but that the charge against her is membership of an illegal armed organization. She was detained during her trial from 28 July 2009 to 28 March 2010. She was convicted and sentenced to 6.5 years in prison for membership of an illegal armed organization, and for 10 months for 'making propaganda'. Seher Tümer has already spent close to one year in prison.

However, we have been informed by KESK that there was no act of violence in the Newroz celebrations or on International Women's Day; Seher Tümer did not chant any slogan accepted as illegal, nor carry a banner; her home was searched by police when she was not at home, which is against the Code of Criminal Procedure, and in the search, the rules of procedure were not observed.

We believe that Seher Tümer has no connection with any illegal armed or unarmed organization, but has been punished for her trade union activities, and for publicizing the deaths of babies in Ankara Zekai Tahir Burak Women's Health Training and Research Hospital.

I would be grateful if you could convey our views to your Government, and would be interested in your response to the points made above.