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Physicians for
Human Rights

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December 20, 2018

Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
President of the Republic of Turkey
Cumhurbaşkanlığı Külliyesi
06560 Beştepe, Ankara, Turkey

Dear President Erdoğan,

I am writing on behalf of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) to express our grave concern about the sentencing yesterday of Dr. Şebnem Korur Fincancı, a world-renowned forensic medical expert, former head of the Department of Forensic Medicine at Istanbul University's Medical Faculty, and former member of the Istanbul Chamber of Medicine Honorary Committee, to two years and six months in prison for signing a peace petition in 2016 along with other respected Turkish academics. Based on the charges and trial, it is apparent that Dr. Fincancı and others who have been sentenced are being persecuted and punished for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and defending human rights.

Dr. Fincancı, a longtime PHR partner, was one of the signatories of "We will not be party to this crime," signed by a group that joined together as "Academics for Peace." The petition spoke out against the violence between the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party and Turkish security forces in the southeast of Turkey, and called for a peaceful solution to the conflict in that region. It also criticized the disproportionately heavy hand of Turkish security forces, which resulted in the bombardment of predominately Kurdish cities as well as the enforcement of curfews.

To date, at least 63 other academics, of the more than 2,200 signatories, have received prison sentences, and 542 have been charged, in connection with the petition. Dr. Fincancı's sentence is markedly higher – a clear indication that, because of her high profile, she is being intentionally targeted for her domestic and international human rights work.

Dr. Fincancı, a globally-known human rights defender and the president of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, is one of the world's leaders in the documentation of torture. She collaborated with PHR and experts from around the world in creating the "Manual on Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment," known as the Istanbul Protocol, which was adopted by the United Nations and is considered the international standard for forensic investigations of torture. Dr. Fincancı was awarded the Physicians for Human Rights Award in 2017, the Hrant Dink Prize in 2014, and the Hessian Peace Prize earlier this year. She is one of thousands of peaceful human rights defenders who are being punished in Turkey merely for speaking out in favor of fairness, justice, and respect for human rights.

We are also seriously concerned about the persecution of other esteemed medical colleagues. Just over one week ago, Dr. Gençay Gürsoy, founder and former president of the Turkish Medical Association, was sentenced to two years and three months in prison on the same false charges as those levied against Dr. Fincancı in court yesterday. And in June 2016, Dr. Fincancı and two co-defendants, Reporters Without Borders representative Erol Önderoğlu and journalist and author Ahmet Nesin, were arrested, briefly imprisoned, and charged for disseminating "terrorist propaganda" after taking part in a solidarity campaign with a newspaper that has been critical of the government.

I respectfully urge you to immediately and unconditionally drop all charges against Dr. Fincancı and her colleagues, who we believe are being targeted merely for peacefully defending human rights and



practicing their right to free expression. Physicians and human rights defenders like Dr. Fincancı should be honored, not persecuted for the work they do. The world's medical and forensic experts and organizations are closely watching the Turkish government's handling of Dr. Fincancı's and the other scholars' cases, and evaluating Turkey's right to stand in the community of scientific and academic freedom and excellence.

I would be pleased to meet with your representatives in Washington, DC or New York at your earliest convenience to discuss this matter.

Thank you for your consideration,

Donna McKay
Executive Director, Physicians for Human Rights

cc: Mr. Binali Yıldırım, President of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey

Mr. Abdülhamit Gül, Minister of Justice of the Republic of Turkey

Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey

Mr. Fahrettin Koca, Minister of Health of the Republic of Turkey

Mr. Serdar Kiliç, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the United States

Mr. Feridun Hadi Sinirlioğlu, Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations