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Physicians for
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19 September 2023

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
Ankara, Türkiye
contact@tccb.gov.tr

Dear President Erdoğan,

As head of one of the world's leading international medical and human rights organizations, I write to you today to call **for the immediate end to ongoing administrative harassment of eminent physician Ayşe Uğurlu and all attempts to silence and punish medical professionals and professional organizations in Türkiye for their defense of human rights.**

Dr. Uğurlu works at the Ankara Training and Research Hospital as a coroner and a member of the Medical Chamber, Executive Board, of the Ankara Chamber of Doctors and the Human Rights Foundation of Türkiye. The Ankara Provincial Directorate of Health is seeking to permanently revoke Dr. Uğurlu's right to practice medicine in public institutions (she has been suspended since July 2023) through disciplinary hearings which are likely to be finalized in the coming days. The process cites her offense as her public support for two lawyers, Ebru Timtik and Ayaç Ünsal, who were on hunger strike in 2020 to demand their rights to a fair trial.

But Dr. Uğurlu has committed no professional infraction. On the contrary, her efforts to bring attention to the health and human rights harms of the use of torture and other ill-treatment in your country is no less than a manifestation of her ethical and professional obligations as a physician to save lives and mitigate suffering. Efforts to silence her – and by example all other medical professionals in Türkiye – constitute violations of her right to freedom of expression and her protected status as a human rights defender. As you know, the Turkish constitution guarantees freedom of thought and opinion (Article 25), freedom of expression and dissemination of thought (Art. 26) and freedom of Science (Art. 27).

Physicians for Human Rights is also concerned that the harassment of Dr. Uğurlu is part of a pattern of harassment of medical professionals in Türkiye. The Turkish constitution guarantees the autonomy of professional organizations (Art. 135). As we have written before, we condemn the civil charges under law 6023 against the eleven members of the Central Council of the Turkish Medical Association (TMA) – Türkiye's largest association of physicians – under Ankara's 31st Civil Law Court Case No.2022/424. The TMA, which has about 110,000 members nationwide, is the Turkish affiliate of the World Medical Association and the Standing Committee of European Doctors and a close partner of Physicians for Human Rights. We can attest to its international reputation for the highest commitment to medical ethics, standards of medical care, and respect for human rights.

Members of the Central Council are among the most eminent medical practitioners in Türkiye, elected by thousands of their peers to represent and lead the country's medical profession. We take this opportunity to once again urge that all charges against the members of the TMA's Central Council be dropped. Their next hearing is scheduled for 10 November 2023.

Sincerely,

Saman Zia-Zarifi
Executive Director
Physicians for Human Rights