

Minister of Justice
Abdulhamit Gül
Ministry of Justice
Adalet Bakanlığı
06659 Ankara
Turkey

Dear Minister,

I am contacting you on the matter of the four students from the Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) who have been detained over a banner containing caricatures of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during their graduation ceremony. The students were held in police custody without charge during 72 hours, then the Ankara Criminal Court of Peace No. 4. ordered that they be remanded in prison pending trial for 'insulting the president' under Article 299/1 of the Turkish Penal Code.

Given the ongoing crackdown on the right to freedom of expression and increasing intolerance of dissenting viewpoints and forms of expression in Turkey, the students face between one and four years in prison if prosecuted and found guilty. Since 2016, hundreds of journalists have been prosecuted and over 150 journalists and other media workers are currently in prison in Turkey. Human rights defenders, civil society actors, and others have faced investigation, detention and conviction for expressing legitimate dissenting views.

Hereby I ask you to release the four students immediately and unconditionally and drop all charges against them. I also point out to ensure full respect and protection of the right to freedom of expression in Turkey. Amnesty International considers Articles 299 ('insulting the president') and 125 ('criminal defamation') of the Turkish Penal Code unacceptable, as criticism of the authorities constitutes protected speech under the European Convention of Human Rights according to various rulings by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

Yours sincerely,