

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Ref.: AL TUR 7/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

30 July 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 61/22, 59/4, 59/5 and 59/14.

In this connection, we are writing to follow up on the concerns expressed in a letter previously sent to your Excellency's Government, regarding the alleged continued repression and renewed judicial harassment of the **Tarlabaşı Community Centre**.

Tarlabaşı Community Centre is a community-based organisation that provides social, psychological and educational support to young people and women in the Istanbul neighborhood of Tarlabaşı, through a rights-based approach with a focus on gender equality and social inclusion. The Centre started in 2006 as part of a project by Istanbul Bilgi University aimed at supporting the participation of migrants in urban life. At the end of the university project, the Centre established itself as an association in June 2007 to ensure the continuation of its work in the Tarlabaşı community on the lives of those living in poverty, especially through collectively promoting, protecting and defending the rights of women, the rights of children and supporting young people against violence, in a manner inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and other gender-diverse (LGBT) persons.

The repression of the Tarlabaşı Community Centre in relation to its right to freedom of association has been the subject of a communication to your Excellency's Government, AL [TUR 8/2025](#) sent on 7 August 2025. We thank the Government of Your Excellency for its [reply](#), received on 6 October 2025. The judicial harassment of another civil society organization working to defend the rights of LGBT persons was the subject of a communication to your Excellency's Government, AL [TUR 3/2026](#) sent on 11 February 2026. We thank the Government of your Excellency for its [reply](#), received on 10 April 2026. Nonetheless, the proliferation of such cases suggests a troubling pattern of repression targeting not only LGBT organizations specifically but also any civil society organization inclusive of LGBT persons.

According to the information received:

The Tarlabası Community Centre (TCC) was the subject of a lawsuit, based on a September 2021 audit by the Ministry of Interior, and filed on 15 October 2021 by the Istanbul Governorate at the Istanbul Civil Peace Court, a first degree court, requesting the “declaration of its non-existence”, based on article 87.1 of the Turkish Civil Code, on grounds that the establishment of the organization was a part of a university project that had ended. TCC responded that its charter includes other unrelated activities, which had not been completed.

On 7 February 2022, the prosecution started another case before the Istanbul Court of First Instance for the “dissolution” of TCC on the grounds of “breaching law and morality,” based on article 89 of the Turkish Civil Code, stating that “the association objectives are not compatible with the legislation and ethics,” and on the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations, claiming that TCC had become “actively against morality and law.”

On 21 February 2022, the Court ordered the suspension of TCC’s activities pending investigation into its dissolution, which began one month later. TCC had to lay off its staff due to the suspension.

On 6 April 2022, the Court lifted the suspension of TCC, which rehired its staff.

Between March 2022 and March 2024, TCC and its members underwent a series of judicial proceedings and were subjected to other types of harassment, including investigations into two of its chairpersons; the start of a criminal case against one of its chairpersons; a series of interventions by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in the two cases of “non-existence” and of dissolution; and a smear campaign by pro-government individuals and media outlets. The smear campaign on social media had resumed at the time of writing this communication.

On 18 May 2022, the Istanbul Court of First Instance ordered expert inquiries into the two cases brought against TCC regarding its “non-existence” and dissolution. On 10 March 2023, an expert issued a report into the “non-existence” case, the findings of which were in favour of TCC. Two expert reports regarding the dissolution case, submitted on 6 February 2023 and 14 October 2023, allegedly did not address relevant matters related to TCC’s case specifically. The Court reportedly did not request a third expert opinion and instead decided to treat the criminal proceedings as a prejudicial matter.

On 14 May 2024, the Istanbul Civil Peace Court, dismissed the case of “non-existence” on grounds that although some of the activities of TCC had ceased with the end of the university project in 2007, others had not, including issues affecting women, children and youth. The Istanbul Governorate and the Ministry of Family and Social Services subsequently appealed the decision.

On 8 October 2024, the local Beyoğlu district municipality, with approval of the Istanbul Governorate, sealed the TCC office on grounds of “unauthorized educational activities.”

On 11 December 2025, the Istanbul Administrative Court dismissed TCC’s case against the sealing. The TCC has appealed to the Istanbul Regional Administrative Court where it is currently pending. The decision has severely hampered their human rights work, while the threat of dissolution has disrupted their funding.

On 21 January 2026, the 12th hearing at the Istanbul Court of First Instance in the dissolution of TCC was held and the Court rejected intervention requests by representatives of other organisations working to defend, promote and protect human rights. It also rejected a request from TCC to revoke its decision to await the result of the criminal case against TCC executives involved, effectively prolonging the case. The next hearing of the criminal case was set for 10 September 2026, and the next hearing in the dissolution case was set for 16 September 2026.

On 22 April 2026, the Appellate Court reversed the decision of the Istanbul Civil Peace Court and declared that TCC was non-existent, dating back to September 2007, when the university project had ended. In its reasoning, the Court referred to the Ministry of Interior’s audit report which said that the university project was closely linked to the TCC which “formed a unified whole with the association,” and considering that the Centre was no longer operational, along with “the issues identified in the audit reports” it concluded that the association was automatically terminated, based on article 87.1 of the Turkish Civil Code.

The Appellate Court also said that it was inappropriate for the Court of First Instance to dismiss the case based on an expert report that “did not align” with the file, without providing the reason. The audit issues referred to by the Court were related to the TCC dissolution case, not the non-existence case at hand. They carried allegations that, in contradiction to article 41 of the Turkish Constitution on the protection of family and child rights, TCC was “making obscene posts on its social media account; creating and implementing content designed to influence children's sexual orientations...to normalize the sexual orientations of individuals known in society as LGBTI and attempting to influence children's sexual identities.”

On 20 May 2026, TCC appealed the decision before the Court of Cassation. The Istanbul Civil Peace Court judgment is not enforceable until it is finalised, and TCC can meanwhile continue its activities. At the time of writing, TCC has no ongoing activities in the neighbourhood.

Without prejudging the accuracy of these allegations, we would like to express our serious concern about the continued judicial harassment and criminalisation of the

Tarlabaşı Community Centre which appears to be directly connected to their human rights work, including their promotion, protection and defence of minority rights, women's rights, the rights of children, the rights of LGBT persons and the right to gender equality. We are alarmed by the continued restrictions to their right to the freedom of association and their right to collectively defend human rights. We are particularly concerned by the chilling effect that such measures have on the ability of human rights defenders and organisations in Türkiye to freely carry out their work, especially those working to defend, promote and protect the rights and needs of individuals or collectives from groups or populations at a higher risk of facing discrimination and marginalization, such as women, children, in particular girls and adolescents, and LGBT persons.

Under international human rights law, the right to freedom of association guarantees individuals the liberty to form, join, and participate in groups to collectively pursue shared interests, protecting both formally registered entities and informal, unregistered associations. The autonomy of any association includes the exclusive right to self-determination regarding its internal governance, life cycle, and dissolution. Therefore, the decision to suspend, conclude, or terminate an association's activities rests solely with the association itself, free from involuntary dissolution, arbitrary state interference, or external imposition.

Pursuant to article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and elaborated by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, this protection applies from the moment an association is established, without requiring prior legal authorization or formal registration, and until the association itself decide their change of status or termination. State obligations dictate that informal associations must be recognized as legitimate actors entitled to operate free from arbitrary state interference, criminalization, or discrimination based on their legal status. Any restrictions imposed by the State must satisfy the strict three-part test under international law: they must be clearly prescribed by law, pursue a legitimate aim (such as national security or public safety), and be strictly necessary and proportionate in a democratic society.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide detailed information as to the factual and legal basis for the decision in the “non-existence” case against TCC as well as the reasons for the dismissal of the expert report that allowed for the Centre to remain operational. Please explain in detail how these measures are

compatible with international law, including the right to freedom of association (see annex).

3. Please provide detailed information as to the factual and legal basis for the “dissolution” case against TCC. Please explain in detail how this measure is compatible with international law, including the right to freedom of association (see annex).
4. Please provide information of the measures taken by your Excellency’s Government to ensure that human rights defenders and civil society organisations are able to carry out their peaceful and legitimate work in a safe and enabling environment without fear of threats or acts of intimidation and harassment of any kind.

This communication, and any response received from your Excellency’s Government, will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) at the 60 days mark. Should Your Excellency’s Government respond within 60 days, both the communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to prevent the re-occurrence of such alleged violation and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Andrea Bolaños Vargas
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Gina Romero
Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Graeme Reid
Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity

Claudia Flores
Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to refer your Excellency's Government to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Türkiye on the 23 September 2003, in particular its articles 2 and 22 which guarantee freedom from discrimination based on any status, and the right to freedom of association.

Article 22 of the ICCPR protects the right to freedom of association with others. It stipulates that "everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others" and that "no restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those which are prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others".

As stated in a report by the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, States not only have a negative obligation to abstain from unduly interfering with the rights of peaceful assembly and of association but also have a positive obligation to facilitate and protect these rights in accordance with international human rights standards ([A/HRC/17/27](#), para. 66; and [A/HRC/29/25/Add.1](#)). This means ensuring that the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are enjoyed by everyone, without discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (article 2 (1) of the ICCPR).

Additionally, the former Special Rapporteur on the on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association has called on States to implement their obligations in a nondiscriminatory manner, "with particular attention to the rights and needs of individuals from groups or populations at higher risk of facing discrimination and marginalization", including those victims of discrimination because of their sexual orientation and gender identity ([A/HRC/53/38/Add.4](#), para. 21).

In this sense, we would like to recall to your Excellency's Government the findings of the former Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, indicating that "[t]he suspension and the involuntarily dissolution of an association are the severest types of restrictions on freedom of association. As a result, it should only be possible when there is a clear and imminent danger resulting in a flagrant violation of national law, in compliance with international human rights law. It should be strictly proportional to the legitimate aim pursued and used only when softer measures would be insufficient" ([A/HRC/20/27](#), para. 75).

The Human Rights Committee has clearly stated that any restrictions on these rights must meet the requirement of legality and also be both necessary for and proportionate to at least one of the permissible grounds for restrictions (CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 36). With regard to article 19(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Human Rights Committee has clarified that States are required to ensure that, when freedom of expression is restricted, the restrictions must have a legitimate objective that is both necessary and proportionate (CCPR/C/GC/34,

para. 35) The Committee has made similar clarifications regarding necessity and proportionality with respect to articles 21 and 22 of the Covenant. (CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 36). Restrictions must aim to achieve a specific objective, not unduly intrude on other rights and must be the least intrusive means to a legitimate end. Any restriction must be compatible with the provisions, aims and objectives of the Covenant, including the prohibition on discrimination. Moral disapproval of same-sex conduct, even if widespread, is not a legitimate ground to restrict fundamental human rights (CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 46).

In his report on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in relation to the human rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association (A/HRC/56/49), the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity explicitly calls on States to remove obstacles for the registration of organizations associated with sexual orientation and gender identity (A/HRC/56/49, para. 78(j)). He observes that States enact a variety of measures to prevent the registration of organizations working on sexual orientation and gender identity: “Many States refuse to register organizations that work on sexual orientation and gender identity-related issues or establish unnecessary administrative obstacles that effectively prevent groups from registering. Sometimes the work of existing groups is suspended by authorities or subjected to official investigation for no reason other than the fact that it is work on sexual orientation and gender identity-related issues.” He draws attention to the deleterious impact of such policies, noting that “this has the effect of undermining the rights to freedom of assembly and association of those groups and organizations – setting the stage for a variety of penalties designed to unlawfully punish individuals and groups for their political opinions, identities, human rights advocacy and efforts to express divergent viewpoints.” (A/HRC/56/49, para. 44)

We would like to recall that the former Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders noted in his report to the Human Rights Council ([A/64/226](#)) that the only legal grounds upon which an interference with the freedom of association that is prescribed by law can be justified is if it meets the test as outlined by article 22, paragraph 2 of the ICCPR. These provisions require the interference in question to be pursuant to ‘legitimate aims’, such as in the interests of national security or public safety; public order (*ordre public*); the protection of public health or morals, or the protection of rights and freedoms of others. Without such a legitimate aim, interference is rendered contrary to international human rights law. In the context of the activities of NGOs, the Special Rapporteur has argued that “criminal sanctions for unregistered activities; government interference, supervision and monitoring of NGO activities; and difficulties in accessing funding may restrict the right to freedom of association and therefore must reach the very high threshold under article 22, paragraph 2, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in order to be admissible.” ([A/64/226](#), para. 58.)

In this context, we would also like to refer your Excellency's Government to the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In particular, we would like to refer to articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration which state that everyone has the right to promote

and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels and that each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We would like in particular to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government the following provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders:

- article 5(b), which provides for the right to form, join and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups.
- article 12, paragraphs 2 and 3, which provides that the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of everyone against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the Declaration.

Furthermore, we would like to reiterate your Excellency's Government of its obligation under the International Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) through its ratification on 20 December 1985, in particular article 7, which provides that States shall take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country.

We would like to refer your Excellency's Government to the thematic report of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls on political and public life ([A/HRC/23/50](#)), which underscores that stigmatization, harassment and outright attacks have been used to silence and discredit women who are outspoken as leaders, community workers, human rights defenders and politicians. Women human rights defenders are often the target of gender-specific violence, such as intimidation, attacks, and death threats, which are sometimes condoned or perpetrated by State actors. Lesbian, bisexual and transgender women who defend their human rights are vulnerable to attacks on their civil rights and personhood where there is a climate of intolerance arising from their perceived challenge to established norms of gender identity, gender roles and sexuality. The Working Group has called upon States to eliminate all forms of violence against women in order to fulfil women's human rights and to facilitate women's participation in political and public life.

In addition, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government the report of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls on girls' and young women's activism ([A/HRC/50/25](#)), which highlights that girls and young women are mobilizing worldwide to demand and catalyze change on critical global issues. They are at the forefront of initiatives aimed at transforming societies towards social justice, gender equality and sustainability. The realization of girls' and young women's human right to participate in public and political life, including organizing and engaging actively with a variety of State and non-State actors, is essential for the protection of their human rights. The Working Group on discrimination against women and girls has called upon States to ensure that mechanisms are in place to solicit the views of girls and young women in all matters of public interest affecting them directly or indirectly and to give due weight to those views.