

Turkey: Political prisoners continue fight as Grup Yorum member perishes

written by Greg Butterfield
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Ibrahim Gökçek at funeral of Helin Bölek in April 2020. Photo: Free Grup Yorum

May 7 — Today, musician and political prisoner Ibrahim Gökçek died in Istanbul, Turkey, after a nearly yearlong hunger strike against the repressive NATO government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Two days earlier, Gökçek had called a temporary pause to his fast, but it was too late.

“We weren’t palace clowns. We didn’t kill people. We sang songs. Damn this system,” said Gökçek shortly before his death.

Bass player Gökçek was the second member of socialist music group Grup Yorum to die in just over a month. His bandmate and fellow hunger-striker [Helin Bölek died on April 3](#). Another political prisoner who joined their “hunger strike to the death,” Mustafa Koçak, died in prison on April 24.

Both Gökçek and Bölek were released from prison earlier this year on medical grounds, as a result of a massive international pressure campaign. But Erdoğan’s regime still refused to meet their demands, which include the unbanning of Grup Yorum concerts and the release of other band members, and so the two continued their hunger strike. In March, the government briefly [kidnapped them from their beds](#) and attempted to force feed them, but failed.

In a May Day appeal to fellow musicians and artists, [Gökçek wrote](#): “I want to live, of course. So, friends, how do I leave the resistance when the resistance has come to this stage, when there is no concrete gain?”

“Now, with all our strength, we must put pressure on the powers to meet our demands. Intellectuals and our musician friends should now meet with the relevant ministry and the presidency by establishing delegations among themselves without delay, and ensure that our demands are met. I greet you all with the warmth of Helin and Mustafa and the enthusiasm of our resistance.”



Borotba's Alexey Albu, Struggle-La Lucha's Greg Butterfield and attorney Aytaç Ünsal at anti-fascist conference in Krasnodon, Lugansk, in May 2016. Today Ünsal is a political prisoner on hunger strike to the death in Turkey. SLL photo

Support hunger strikers' demands

Four years ago, at a May 2016 anti-fascist conference in Krasnodon, Lugansk People's Republic, Ukrainian activist Alexey Albu introduced me to Aytaç Ünsal from the People's Law Office in Turkey. Today, Ünsal and many other attorneys who represent political movements, including Grup Yorum, have themselves become political prisoners in Turkey.

Ünsal and his colleague Ebru Timtik are now on a hunger strike to the death, following the example of İbrahim Gökçek and Helin Bölek. Aytac is on day 96 of his death fast. Ebru is on day 127 of hers.

The blood of the Grup Yorum musicians is on the hands of Erdoğan. It is also on the hands of U.S. President Donald Trump and the leaders of the NATO imperialist powers who allow the fascist regime in Turkey to run rampant against the working class and peasants, leftist and Kurdish movements at home, while carrying out genocidal wars on NATO's behalf against neighboring Syria and in faraway Libya.

It is urgent for leftist and workers' movements in the U.S. to join the international campaign to save Turkey's hunger strikers and support their demands. These include:

- Lift the ban on Grup Yorum concerts.
- Release imprisoned members of Grup Yorum. Five Grup Yorum musicians are still in detention. All are charged with being members of a "terrorist organization" — the communist Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP-C). A sign of goodwill by the government would be the release of Sultan Gökcek and Ali Araci, who have their trial on May 20.
- Stop raiding the Idil Cultural Centre.
- A fair trial for all political prisoners.
- Reversal of unjust judgments against hundreds of political prisoners, especially against the people's lawyers for up to 18 years in prison as a result of statements by "secret witnesses" and statements by police informant Cavit Yilmaz.
- A fair trial for all accused!

Free the people's lawyers, Grup Yorum members and all political prisoners! Tell Trump and Erdogan to meet their demands now!

For updates, follow [Free Grup Yorum](#) on Twitter and [People's Law Office](#) on Facebook.

