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March 22, 2021

**BY E-MAIL**

The Honourable Marc Garneau, MP  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
House of Commons  
OTTAWA, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Garneau:

### **The Case of Cihan Erdal, a Turkish-Canadian PhD Student Imprisoned in Turkey**

On behalf of the 700,000 members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), we are writing about the urgent need for Canada to defend and support Canadian permanent resident Cihan Erdal. Cihan has been unjustly imprisoned in Turkey since September 25, 2020. We repeat a request made to your predecessor, the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, that the Canadian government act immediately to ensure Cihan's safe return to Canada.

Cihan Erdal, is a queer youth activist, PhD student at Carleton University in Ottawa, and member of CUPE 4600. He was in Turkey visiting family and conducting doctoral fieldwork when he was arrested and detained along with dozens of other activists, academics, and opposition politicians. He continues to be held in prison in Ankara, often in solitary confinement and is scheduled to face trial on April 26, 2021.

Cihan has now been in jail for six months, and the prosecutor's office has produced no "evidence" beyond two Facebook posts—neither of which constitute evidence of any form of "terrorism". He has never been arrested, detained, or imprisoned.

Cihan is a former member of the HDP's central executive committee. HDP (the Halkların Demokratik Partisi, or Peoples' Democratic Party) is a social-democratic party representing Turkey's pluralism and is the country's third-largest political party. Like others in the HDP, Cihan is committed above all to promoting democracy, social solidarity, and the rights of minorities and marginalized groups, within and beyond Turkey.

HDP is part of the parliamentary opposition to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party. In October 2014, protesters in dozens of cities and towns throughout Turkey came together to pressure the government into providing assistance to the mostly Kurdish inhabitants of Kobanî, a Syrian town directly adjacent to the Turkish border that was under heavy siege by Islamic State forces. Police and demonstrators clashed violently and repeatedly during these protests. Among those supporting the protests were members of opposition political parties such as the HDP.

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**MARK HANCOCK**  
National President/Président national

**CHARLES FLEURY**  
National Secretary-Treasurer/Secrétaire-trésorier national

**BENOÎT BOUCHARD, PAUL FAORO, FRED HAHN, JUDY HENLEY, SHERRY HILLIER**  
General Vice-Presidents/Vice-présidences générales

Six years later, Cihan was detained for his involvement in the HDP at the time of the protests. It took four months for his lawyers to learn, in January 2021, that the public prosecutor's indictment is based on two Facebook posts from Cihan's personal account. Prosecutors claim the posts expressed support for an upswell of rebellion, stoking the decades-long conflict between state security forces and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê, or "PKK") separatists. This is said to constitute a violation of Turkish constitutional and national security law, amounting to "terrorism" and posing a threat to the country's unity and sovereignty. In reality, the posts link to web pages and articles that are vaguely critical of the government and still available online.

Recently, the European Parliament explicitly highlighted Cihan's case when formally condemning Turkey's ongoing repression of opposition party members, as well as other politicians, activists, lawyers, and political prisoners. It is time for the Canadian government to do the same.

We therefore respectfully request that the government of Canada immediately take the following actions:

1. publicly state that Cihan's arbitrary arrest and detention violate international law and call for his immediate release;
2. formally request that Global Affairs Canada Department Consular Case Management unit takes on Cihan's case, and Canadian officials be given access to the trial beginning on April 26, 2021, in Ankara;
3. assign a consular officer to meet with Cihan's lawyer, Levent Piskin, as soon as possible.

This arbitrary mass arrest is garnering national and international attention and is clearly politically motivated. We again call on the Canadian government to act immediately to secure Cihan's immediate release and guarantee his safe return to Canada.

Sincerely,



MARK HANCOCK  
National President



CHARLES FLEURY  
National Secretary-Treasurer

cc: R. Oliphant, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs  
M. Morgan, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs  
C. MacLennan, Associate Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs  
M. Chong, Shadow Minister of Foreign Affairs  
J. Harris, NDP Foreign Affairs Critic  
Embassy of the Republic of Turkey to Canada  
Embassy of Canada to the Republic of Turkey  
Canadian Labour Congress  
Public Services International