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Türkiye: Judicial harassment of LGBTQI+ rights defender Defne Güzel

On 20 January 2026, the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office filed a criminal lawsuit against **Defne Güzel**, a trans woman human rights defender and the chairperson of **17 Mayıs Derneği** (May 17 Association), for allegedly violating the Law on Associations (2911). The charge is based on the claim that two publications of 17 Mayıs Association, titled '[My Intersex Story](#)', a book about lived experiences of intersex people, and '[Children, Roe Deer, Flowers, Fire](#)', an exhibition catalogue, violate "public morality". According to Türkiye's Law on Associations, the chair of the organisation is held responsible if an organisation breaks the law. The first hearing of the trial is set for 12 May 2026 at the Ankara 74th Criminal Court of First Instance. If convicted, Defne Güzel faces one to three years of imprisonment (Law on Association art. 32(p)).

Defne Güzel is a trans woman human rights defender working on LGBTQI+ rights and sexual health. She currently is the Chairperson of 17 Mayıs Derneği (The 17 May Association). She is an expert in monitoring and documenting LGBTQI+ human rights violations and combating hate crimes and discrimination. Defne Güzel has a longstanding involvement in many human rights organisations in Türkiye, including KaosGL, Human Rights Association, Red Umbrella, and the Women's Platform for Equality (EŞİK). She is also the founder of Pozitif Alan (Positive Space), a human rights organisation defending the rights of LGBTQI+ people living with HIV.

17 Mayıs Association was one of the many LGBTQI+ associations targeted by the wave of systemic audits in 2024, conducted by the Ankara Directorate of Relations with Civil Society under the Ministry of Interior. Following the audit, the Ankara Directorate filed a notice with the Public Prosecutor's Office, alleging that some of the content on the website and social media posts of the 17 Mayıs Association are not considered to be in line with the objectives that are in the organisation's statute.

For the investigation against 17 Mayıs Association, the Prosecutor's Office appointed a three-member expert panel. The panel issued its report on 9 July 2025, concluding that contrary to the Directorate's notice, the activities of the 17 Mayıs Association align with its statute and that no irregularities were found.

The Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office disregarded the findings of the expert report, and prepared an indictment based on the findings of the Ankara Directorate's audit. The Office requested the Court to prosecute Defne Güzel as the chair of the organisation for violating the Law on Associations, which is punishable by one to three years of imprisonment. The materials of 17 Mayıs Association that are considered "contrary to public morality" are 'My Intersex Story' and 'Children, Roe Deer, Flowers, Fires'. 'My Intersex Story' is a Turkish translation of a book published by OII Europe, the umbrella organisation of European human rights-based intersex organisations, in which intersex individuals share their personal narratives. 'Children, Roe Deer, Flowers, Fires' is a catalogue of the art exhibition depicting "naked women bodies." Additionally, in violation of the principle of "individuality of criminal responsibility", Defne Güzel is being held accountable for social media posts made by third parties using the hashtag #MyIntersexStory.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the repeated attempts of the Turkish authorities to criminalise LGBTQI+ rights organisations and defenders based on the Law on Associations and alleged violations against "public morality." It is highly concerning that the Turkish authorities have disregarded the findings of the experts assigned by the Prosecutor's Office to investigate 17 Mayıs Association, as these findings did not provide grounds for prosecution. Front Line Defenders believes that Defne Güzel was targeted because of her and 17 Mayıs Association's legitimate human rights work to defend LGBTQI+ rights in Türkiye and abroad. This case appears to be the Turkish authorities' latest efforts in their proclaimed "war on LGBTQI+ rights." LGBTQI+ organisations in Türkiye have been facing increasing discriminatory administrative scrutiny, judicial harassment, and censorship. Recently, similar "obscenity" and "general morality" charges have been used to target other organisations such as the [Young LGBTI+ Association](#).

Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities in Türkiye to:

- 1) Immediately drop the baseless charges against Defne Güzel;
- 2) End the crackdown on LGBTQI+ rights organisations and defenders;
- 3) Ensure a safe environment free from harassment and reprisals for all human rights defenders, especially LGBTQI+ rights defenders, to continue working peacefully to secure the full enjoyment of fundamental rights for all.

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