

10 October 2025

LAWASIA STATEMENT OF CONCERN ON ACTION BEING TAKEN AGAINST ISTANBUL BAR ASSOCIATION

LAWASIA expresses immense concern at criminal charges framed against members of the Istanbul Bar Association (IBA) and its President, Mr. Ibrahim Kaboglu as well as the arrest of a board member Mr. Firat Epözdemir. The charges culminate from a series of events that follow a statement released by the Istanbul Bar Association in December 2024.

On 21 December 2024, the IBA released a statement calling for an investigation into the death of two Kurdish journalists, Nazım Daştan and Cihan Bilgin, who were killed in northern Syria on 19 December 2024.¹ On 22 December 2024, the Chief Public Prosecutor's Office in Istanbul launched a criminal investigation against the President and the board of the bar association, accusing them of exceeding the Bar's professional mandate by engaging in political activist and accusing them of "disseminating terrorist propaganda" and "public dissemination of misleading information".² On 25 January 2025, Mr. Epözdemir was arrested at Istanbul airport, upon his return from a meeting with the council of Europe.

On 14 January 2025, civil lawsuit was also filed against the board and the President of the IBA, by the Prosecutor's office, seeking their dismissal. On 21 March 2025, the Istanbul 2nd Civil Court of First Instance ruled that the board members had acted beyond the Bar's mandate and ordered the dismissal of the entire executive board of the Istanbul Bar Association. The appeal against the aforesaid order is pending.³

LAWASIA also notes that several lawyers who protested against this ruling outside the courthouse were arrested. Subsequently, six lawyers who defended the demonstrators were also arrested.⁴

¹ <https://medyanews.net/istanbul-bar-condemns-turkish-killing-of-journalists-in-syria-attack/>

² <https://www.duvarenglish.com/prosecutors-launch-terrorism-probe-into-istanbul-bar-association-over-posts-on-journalists-killed-in-syria-news-65428>

³ <https://www.mlsaturkey.com/en/istanbul-court-removes-bar-association-leadership-amid-protests-by-lawyers>

⁴ <https://www.icj.org/turkiye-arrests-of-lawyers-in-izmir-another-blow-to-the-administration-of-justice-and-the-legal-profession/>

LAWASIA joins the IBAHRI⁵, the Law Society of England and Wales⁶, the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe⁷, the OHCHR⁸ and other organisations in extending its support to the Istanbul Bar Association and calling upon the relevant authorities in Istanbul to withdraw or cease any action that violates the principles that govern the legal profession and international human rights law.

The criminalization of the legal profession is bound to interfere with the administration of justice, independence of the legal profession, and have a chilling effect on the freedom of expression. LAWASIA finds it relevant to reiterate the principles enunciated in the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers 1990, specifically:

14. Lawyers, in protecting the rights of their clients and in promoting the cause of justice, shall seek to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms recognized by national and international law and shall at all times act freely and diligently in accordance with the law and recognized standards and ethics of the legal profession.

16. Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

23. Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognized standards and ethics of the legal profession.

LAWASIA calls upon the relevant authorities in Istanbul to:

⁵ <https://www.ibanet.org/Turkiye-IBAHRI-urges-authorities-to-drop-lawsuit-against-Istanbul-Bar-Association>

⁶ <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/contact-or-visit-us/press-office/press-releases/dismissal-of-istanbuls-bar-leadership-sparks-concern>

⁷ https://www.ccbe.eu/fileadmin/speciality_distribution/public/documents/Statements/2025/EN_HR_20250227_CCBE-statement-in-support-of-the-Istanbul-Bar-Association.pdf

⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/05/criminalisation-istanbul-bar-association-and-dismissal-executive-board>

- i. Withdraw/cease all criminal and civil proceedings or action initiated against the Istanbul Bar Association and its Board and other lawyers in connection with the present matter.
- ii. Release all lawyers who have been arrested in connection with the present matter
- iii. Adhere to the principles of international human rights law and the principles governing the independence of lawyers.



Shyam Divan
President LAWASIA, The Law Association for Asia and The Pacific