

**The Rt Hon. James Cleverly MP**

Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs  
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH

Sent via email

10 November 2022

**Re. Urgent call for the release of Professor Şebnem Korur Fincancı, President of the Turkish Medical Association (TMA) from arbitrary detention and indictment.**

Dear Foreign Secretary,

I am writing to you on behalf of the British Medical Association to draw your attention to the worrying case of our Turkish colleague, Professor Şebnem Korur Fincancı, President of the Turkish Medical Association (TMA), who has been arbitrarily detained since 26 October 2022. I urge you to make representations to the Turkish Government to call for her immediate release and for the Government to respect the independence of the TMA.

Professor Fincancı was arrested after she publicly called for an independent investigation into the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Turkish military in Northern Iraq during a live TV interview on 19 October 2022. The Ankara 3rd Criminal Court ordered her arrest on charges of “spreading propaganda for a terrorist organisation.”

We work regularly with Professor Fincancı in the framework of the activities of the [World Medical Association](#) (WMA), of which both our organisations are members. She participates in WMA's activities as an anti-torture expert and qualified physician with long-standing commitments to human rights and the ethical values of our profession.

Launching a criminal investigation against Professor Fincancı simply because she called for an inquiry into allegations of the use of banned weapons violates her right to freedom of expression and contravenes the Turkish authorities' duty to protect human rights in accordance with its international commitments. It also threatens to violate fundamental principles of medical impartiality and neutrality: the binding obligation on doctors and other health professionals to focus on health and wellbeing beyond narrow partisan interests.

The Ankara Prosecutor General's Office has since taken further action against the TMA, and on 30 October, initiated legal proceedings to dismiss TMA Council Members, for their actions or statements in favour of “terrorist organisations”.

**Co-chief executive officers:** Neeta Major & Rachel Podolak

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In response to Professor Fincancı's ongoing detention and indictment, UN human rights experts have urged Turkish authorities to stop using counter-terrorism legislation to discredit and intimidate human rights defenders and groups. In their recent [statement](#), the UN Special Rapporteurs have said that such attacks "interrupt vital human rights and medical work" and "undermine the rule of law and encroach upon fundamental freedoms and democratic values". The UN have called for the immediate and unconditional release of Professor Fincancı and for an end to the incessant judicial harassment and targeting that she has been subjected to for her legitimate human rights activities. The BMA joins these calls and condemns any attempts to remove her from post as the President of the TMA.

We have worked for decades with the TMA and have enduring respect for its commitment to health-related human rights. Yet the Turkish Government has repeatedly threatened its integrity. These threats form a consistent part of the Government's attempt to undermine Turkish civil society more broadly. In October 2020, the WMA adopted unanimously a [Resolution](#) calling for the TMA's protection as a national independent association and as the main representative body of all physicians in the country.

These deliberate acts of coercion by the State authorities against the medical profession in Turkey are a matter of grave concern for the global health and human rights community. We believe that an intervention on your part with the Turkish authorities in support of Professor Fincancı and for the independence of TMA would make a difference and usefully contribute to the safeguarding of international ethical standards of the medical profession. It would also send a clear message on the importance of upholding human rights and fundamental freedoms in all circumstances and in accordance with international human rights standards and instruments ratified by Turkey.

We thank you in advance for your prompt action.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Latifa Patel**  
Chair of BMA Representative Body