

**STATEMENT**

Paris, June 12, 2023

**The UIA-IROL Welcomes Acquittal of Eleven Turkish Lawyers Accused of  
“Insult to a Public Official”**

**The UIA-IROL hereby expresses its relief and satisfaction regarding the recent acquittal of eleven former members of the Board of the Ankara Bar Association, including its former chairman and the current President of the Union of Turkish Bar Associations.**

The aforementioned lawyers were subjected to criminal proceedings, facing charges of "insult to a public official," which carries the severe penalty of up to two years in prison. These charges were directly linked to a statement issued by the Ankara Bar Association, in which they rightfully denounced the remarks made by Mr. Ali Erbaş, the head of Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate. Mr. Erbaş's sermon on April 24, 2020 included inflammatory remarks suggesting that members of the LGBT community were disease carriers, thereby urging others to "join the fight to protect people from such evil."

On the one hand, the UIA-IROL welcomes the decision of the Turkish judiciary to acquit the eleven lawyers in question, thereby demonstrating a commitment to upholding the independence and integrity of the legal system. The ruling not only recognizes the fundamental right to freedom of expression but also acknowledges the vital role played by legal professionals in upholding the rule of law and safeguarding democratic values. The acquittal also serves as a testament to the resilience and dedication of these lawyers who have been unjustly targeted and prosecuted.

On the other hand, the UIA-IROL wishes to once again express its deep regret and concern that an independent professional organization such as the Ankara Bar Association (together with its Board) could be subjected to legal proceedings for exercising their legitimate right to express their concerns and defend the principles of human rights and equality. Civil society organisations, including bar associations, play a crucial role in upholding the rule of law, protecting human rights, and fostering a just and inclusive society. Their ability to operate freely and without fear of reprisals is vital to the functioning of a democratic society.

The UIA-IROL closely monitored with concern the proceedings since the opening of the criminal investigation<sup>1</sup>, including by sending observers to the various hearings<sup>2</sup>.

Consequently, the UIA-IROL renews its call to the Turkish authorities to ensure the protection of lawyers, judges, and legal professionals, thus enabling them to carry out their duties without undue interference or intimidation.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> See [here](#) and [here](#).

Lastly, the UIA-IROL remains committed to supporting the global legal community and will continue to monitor the situation in Turkey and other jurisdictions where the rights and freedoms of legal professionals are at risk. We stand in solidarity with lawyers worldwide, particularly those facing unwarranted prosecutions or threats due to their professional activities.

#### **More about UIA-IROL**

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*The Institute for the Rule of Law of the International Association of Lawyers (UIA-IROL) promotes the Rule of Law and supports and defends, in particular, (1) lawyers, judges and human rights defenders who are harassed, threatened and/or persecuted in the exercise of their professions, (2) the independence of the legal and judicial professions, and (3) the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, especially in defense of human rights.*

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