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Press Release: For immediate release

KHRP Issues Joint Statement Concerning the Arrest of Mr Muharrem Erbey, Vice President of the Human Rights Association of Turkey (İHD)

KHRP together with the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales, European Lawyers for Democracy and Human Rights, Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers, and The Law Society of England and Wales have issued the following co-signed statement expressing grave concern over the arrest and detention of Mr Muharrem Erbey, Vice President of the Human Rights Association of Turkey (İHD), and President of the İHD's office in Diyarbakir. The statement is as follows:

In the very early hours of the morning on Christmas Eve 2009, lawyer Mr. Muharrem Erbey – Vice President of the Human Rights Association of Turkey (İnsan Hakları Derneği or İHD) and President of the İHD's branch office in Diyarbakir, was detained by Anti-Terror Units of the Diyarbakir Security Directorate as part of an operation launched simultaneously in 11 provinces of Turkey, in which more than 80 people were detained. The stated reason for Mr. Erbey's detention was his alleged membership of the Kurdish Communities Union (Koma Ciwaken Kurdistan or KCK), which is said to be a branch of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). He was subsequently arrested the following day and is currently being held in Diyarbakir D-Type prison awaiting trial.

Mr. Erbey's house was searched while he was in detention and his request that a lawyer be present during the search was refused. During the search of İHD's offices police confiscated computers and documentation including archives documenting 21 years of human rights abuses. These include information on cases that are currently at the European Court of Human Rights and in which Mr Erbey is representing the applicants.

Mr. Erbey is highly regarded both in Turkey and internationally for his work as a human rights lawyer and defender, recently working on cases of extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances in the region. İHD has been a partner organisation of the Kurdish Human Rights Project for many years together they have gained redress for hundreds of victims of human rights abuses in Turkey in cases at the European Court of Human Rights.

During his interrogation, Mr. Erbey was asked extensively about his work with the İHD, including several international visits he's conducted in order to draw attention to human rights abuses in the region. Mr. Erbey completely rejects the charges against him. His arrest, raises concerns about the freedom of human rights defenders in Turkey to work without intimidation and harassment and potentially violates numerous principles of international human rights law including the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

We the undersigned are gravely concerned about the arrest and detention of Muharrem Erbey and the human rights violations he has suffered on account of being a human rights defender. We therefore call on the Turkish authorities to investigate and monitor prosecution of this case and of all human rights defenders according to domestic and international law and for this case to be dealt with expeditiously.

- Kurdish Human Rights Project, London
- Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales
- The Law Society of England and Wales
- Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers, London
- European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH)