

URGENT ACTION

ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDER ON TRIAL

Esra Işık, a 26-year-old environmental human rights defender, is facing prosecution under Articles 265 and 125 of the Turkish Penal Code for allegedly “preventing a public official from performing their duty” and “insulting public officials.” She was detained on 30 March after taking part in a peaceful protest against an urgent expropriation decision affecting villages near Akbelen forest, including İkizköy in Muğla province in south-west Türkiye. She was held in pretrial detention for 42 days. Following a Council of State decision suspending the expropriation order, she was released, but the criminal proceedings against her are ongoing. Esra Işık has been detained and prosecuted simply for exercising her rights. The next hearing is scheduled for 22 June. The charges must be dropped immediately.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Enis Tekgül

Milas Chief Public Prosecutor

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Dear Chief Public Prosecutor,

I am writing to express serious concern regarding the prosecution of environmental human rights defender **Esra Işık**, who was deprived of her liberty between 30 March and 11 May on charges of “resisting to prevent the performance of duty of a public official” and “insulting public officials” (Articles 265 and 125 of the Turkish Penal Code). Esra Işık has been detained and prosecuted simply for exercising her rights.

This case arises in the context of long-standing environmental and land disputes in the Milas–Yatağan region, where local communities, including Esra Işık’s family, have faced repeated displacement linked to mining activities. In recent years, local communities have been peacefully opposing the expansion of coal mines, including through their participation in protests against the emergency expropriation decision affecting hundreds of parcels of private land in the Akbelen area.

On 7 May 2026, the Council of State (Danıştay 6th Chamber) issued a decision suspending the execution of the emergency expropriation orders concerning private property in six neighbourhoods in the Akbelen region of İkizköy (Milas, Muğla). The broader legal dispute over the coal mine and the destruction of the Akbelen forest has been ongoing for seven years, alongside continued peaceful efforts by local communities to halt further expansion.

We respectfully urge your office to ensure that the charges against Esra Işık are dropped immediately and that her rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly are fully protected, in line with Türkiye’s obligations under international human rights law.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 30 March 2026, 26-year-old environmental defender Esra Işık was taken into custody in Milas (Muğla, Türkiye) while she was participating in a peaceful protest during the on-site visits by officials in the context of an emergency expropriation decision impacting the local villages. She was subsequently held in pretrial detention on charges of “preventing the performance of duty of a public official” (Article 265 of the Turkish Penal Code) and “insulting public officials” (Article 125 of the Turkish Penal Code). At the first hearing in her prosecution on 27 April 2026, the Court ruled to continue her pretrial detention, but she was released from prison on 11 May 2026 following the Council of State ruling to suspend the execution of the emergency expropriation order. The next hearing in her prosecution, expected to be a decision hearing, is scheduled for 22 June 2026.

On 30 March at around 7:30 pm, officials arrived in Karacahisar village to conduct court-ordered on-site inspections in the context of an emergency expropriation order concerning 649 separate parcels of land and property. These inspections were carried out in a highly compressed time frame and in the absence of meaningful participation by affected landowners and their legal representatives.

According to the official incident report, a group including a judge, a court clerk, and court-appointed experts arrived in the area in the evening hours. Local residents who had gathered in response to ongoing expropriation disputes confronted what they believed to be unidentified or company-linked vehicles.

Esra Işık (the daughter of Nejla Işık, elected representative of the village of İkizköy) was among the residents present. Amnesty International reviewed footage from the incident which shows local residents including Esra Işık intensely arguing with individuals in an unmarked van, demanding they leave the local community alone, in what was clearly a very charged atmosphere. The footage shows the vehicle eventually leaving. Esra Işık has been detained and prosecuted simply for exercising her rights. She disputes the allegations against her, stating that she did not recognize the group as a judicial delegation at the time and did not direct any threatening or insulting remarks toward court officials. She further argues that the identification of the delegation as court personnel was not clear, and that similar confusion had occurred previously in the region during mining-related operations involving unmarked or company-associated vehicles.

On 31 March, the Milas Criminal Judgeship of Peace ordered Esra Işık’s pretrial detention, citing the nature of the alleged offences and the possibility of influencing ongoing proceedings related to other inspections in the region.

Esra Işık’s pretrial detention and prosecution occurred in the context of a wider and ongoing dispute over land, forests, and agricultural livelihoods in the Milas–Yatağan region, particularly around the Akbelen forest and surrounding villages in the last decade. Esra Işık’s family history is directly shaped by this long-standing process of displacement: due to coal mining activities, her maternal grandparents were forced to leave Sekköy and Karacaağaç, also in Milas district of Muğla and resettle in İkizköy, while her paternal family was also displaced from Işıkdere, a neighbourhood in the area that has been depopulated in the expansion of the mining through expropriation in 2017. Today, the family once again faces the risk of eviction from the home and agricultural land where they resettled, as expropriation measures continue to pose a threat to their and other villagers’ property.

Local communities have opposed deforestation and the expansion of mining activities that threaten olive groves, farmland, and rural settlement areas. In 2024 and again in 2026, emergency expropriation decisions were issued covering large numbers of parcels across several villages, including land belonging to Esra Işık’s family. These measures have been widely challenged before domestic courts, including the Council of State and the Constitutional Court.

In parallel, legislative changes adopted in 2025 have further facilitated mining operations in olive-growing regions. These regulations have been criticised by civil society and legal experts as enabling accelerated and targeted expropriation of agricultural land for extractive industries. As a result, thousands of olive trees have already been uprooted in the Akbelen area.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: [English, Turkish]

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 12 December 2026

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Esra Işık (She/Her)