Media Brief

Free them now: solidarity with LGBTI+ civil society in Türkiye

Women and Gender Constituency (WGC) — 16 November 2026, *COP31*, *Antalya*

Women and Gender Constituency (WGC) and allies - Solidarity action on Gender Justice Day on 16 November

Climate justice needs people who are free to speak up. Since 12 September, authorities in Türkiye have detained dozens of LGBTI+ activists, raided their offices and prosecuted their organisations, in the weeks before hosting COP31. On Gender Justice Day we stand with them inside the COP venue and ask the COP31 Presidency to act.

The action on 16 November

- **When:** 16 November 2026, 13:00h
- **Where:** Action location 2
- **What:** Solidarity action with testimonials from regional perspectives
- **Who can join:** everyone attending COP31: delegates, observers, constituencies, media. Bring LGBTI+ symbols / wear: purple for gender justice day

Our demands

We call on the COP31 Presidency (Türkiye), the President of Negotiations (Australia) and the UNFCCC Secretariat to:

1. Call for the **immediate release** of everyone detained for their human rights and association work.
2. Give a **public, unambiguous guarantee of safety** to all COP31 participants, whatever their identity, before, during and after the COP.
3. Ensure the **full and meaningful participation** of LGBTI+, feminist and environmental defenders from Türkiye.

4. Give a **formal, public response** reaffirming Türkiye's and Australia's obligations on freedom of association, expression and peaceful assembly.

5. Commit that **lawful international funding of civil society**, including UNFCCC observer constituencies, will not be treated as suspect.

The open letter

On 6 November, six UNFCCC observer constituencies published an open letter to the COP31 Presidency: WGC, ENGO Demand Climate Justice, ENGO Climate Action Network, Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPO), YOUNGO and Trade Union NGOs (TUNGO). It follows an earlier letter of 19 September. The verbal guarantees received so far are not enough.

As of November 15 2026 114 organisations and individuals signed the letter. You can still sign the letter at **bit.ly/SignLetterLBGTICrackdown** Read it at: **bit.ly/LGBTICrackdownLetter.**

What is happening in Türkiye

The operation named “My Family Is Safe” began on 12 September 2026 and has spread across 15 provinces. It targets nine associations: seven working on LGBTI+ rights and two working with people living with HIV. According to Turkish LGBTI+ organisations (briefing of 13 November):

- **Two months behind bars:** 67 people arrested on 12 September are still in pre-trial detention, including 14 LGBTI+ activists. Ten LGBTI+ and HIV activists have been released, the first only after a month.
- **Trans women targeted in new raids** in Istanbul (26 September), Ankara and six other provinces (23 October) and Izmir (3 November). At least 16 trans women have been arrested on obscenity and “facilitating prostitution” charges, which indirectly criminalise sex work and the livelihoods of trans women already living in poverty. Five trans women held since 12 September were released at their first hearing on 12 November.
- **Dissolution requested for four organisations:** prosecutors want SPoD, Hevi, Pozitif Yaşam (Positive Life) and Pozitif-iz dissolved, and their founders sentenced to one to three years in prison. More requests are expected. Kaos GL board members, and a journalist who wrote for its website, are charged with obscenity over ten social media posts.
- **Ordinary work treated as evidence:** the indictments cite workshops, book clubs, film screenings, legal and health support, employment work, Kurdish-language sexual health brochures and social media posts, and claim these let “a minority dominate the majority”.
- **International funding treated as a crime:** lawfully reported grants are listed in the indictments, and the Istanbul prosecutor has asked for a money-laundering investigation into six associations over funds from abroad.

- **Community spaces closed:** on 11 November, authorities sealed the Istanbul office of Lambdaistanbul, one of Türkiye's oldest LGBTI+ organisations, for holding community events such as tea talks without a permit. Its answer: “We will not give up our spaces for collective solidarity!”
- **Prison conditions:** prisons run at over 133% capacity. LGBTI+ detainees face isolation, transfers far from home and discrimination over HIV status, and trans women are held in men's prisons.

Trials to watch: SPoD founders on **18 November, 13:30**, Istanbul, two days after our action; Hevi on **9 December**, Istanbul; Kaos GL on **24 December**, Ankara. The organisations ask the international community to attend and monitor the hearings.

Why this matters for climate justice

Climate change hits hardest those who were already pushed to the margins. LGBTI+ people are more likely to face poverty, homelessness and poor health, and they are often left out when disasters strike. Very few countries collect data on sexual orientation and gender identity, so most of the evidence comes from community testimony and smaller studies. One of the few national data sets comes from a US Census Bureau survey. It found that LGBTQ+ people were nearly twice as likely to be displaced by a disaster, and far more likely never to return home. Smaller studies and community reports from every region describe the same patterns: discrimination when aid is handed out, unsafe shelters, health care cut off, and LGBTI+ people blamed for the disasters themselves.

LGBTI+ organisations are part of the climate response. They run shelters and mutual aid when the state does not reach their communities. They provide health care, including HIV care, and they document what official data leaves out. In Türkiye, this same work is now being cited as evidence of a crime: legal and health support, community spaces, sexual health information. Two of the targeted associations work with people living with HIV. Prosecuting trans women for how they earn a living pushes people already in poverty further into risk. Closing these organisations leaves whole communities less able to cope with the next heatwave, wildfire or flood.

Democratic backsliding rarely starts everywhere at once. It moves step by step. LGBTI+ groups are often targeted first. Feminist and women’s rights organisations come next, then human rights, environmental and climate defenders. The same tools are used each time: “protecting the family” and “public morality” as justification, foreign funding presented as a threat, and ordinary association work turned into a criminal offence.

The defenders being targeted in Türkiye belong to the same feminist, environmental and youth movements that the UNFCCC process says it wants to include. Their knowledge is badly needed. Only 23 of 198 countries mention sexual and gender minorities in their national adaptation planning. When the host country criminalises these movements, the integrity of COP31 is at stake. Safety and participation are preconditions for climate action.

A pattern across the region

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Türkiye has no foreign agent law and none is currently proposed. But we recognise the pattern from neighbouring countries, where similar rhetoric later hardened into law:

- **Georgia** adopted a "transparency of foreign influence" law in 2024, forcing groups with more than 20% foreign funding to register as serving a foreign power. A 2025 foreign agents act extended this to individuals, with criminal penalties. Amendments in 2025 and March 2026 made foreign grants subject to government approval. In 2024, Georgia also passed a law restricting LGBTI+ rights in the name of "family values".
- **Russia** started with a foreign agents law in 2012 and went on to designate the "international LGBT movement" as extremist in 2023. Independent civil society has largely been shut down.

Solidarity is growing

- The **EU** (EEAS spokesperson and the Enlargement Commissioner) has condemned the arrests and said the crackdown widens the gap with Türkiye's EU membership bid.
- In **Germany**, the federal Queer Commissioner and Human Rights Commissioner have publicly condemned the raids, and parliamentarians are pressing the government to raise the issue with Ankara.
- **Ireland**, current holder of the EU Council presidency, has raised the situation in parliament and aligned with the Council of Europe LGBTI Group of Friends statement on Türkiye.
- **The Council of Europe** Parliamentary Assembly adopted Resolution 2681 on 1 October, calling on Türkiye to end "repression, intimidation, harassment and violence against LGBTI persons and defenders".
- On 22 September, **Norway**'s ambassador in Ankara delivered a diplomatic démarche to the Turkish authorities on behalf of 10 countries, including Ireland. It reminded Türkiye of its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including freedom of expression and assembly, non-discrimination and the protection of LGBTI+ people. *(Source: unikuir1.org "Norveç öncülüğünde LGBTİ+ hakları için 10 ülkeden Türkiye'ye diplomatik uyarı (demarş)")*

How you can show solidarity

- **Join the action** on 16 November and share it online.
- **Share the open letter** and its demands: https://womengenderclimate.org
- **Monitor the trials** on 18 November, 9 December and 24 December, in person or through your embassy, and speak out before, during and after each hearing.
- **Ask your government** to call for the release of all detainees, the withdrawal of the dissolution cases and an end to treating international funding as a crime, bilaterally and at COP31.
- **Write to the Turkish embassy** in your country with the same demands, and share statements from Turkish LGBTI+ organisations.
- Amplify Turkish feminist and LGBTI movements statements.

Contacts to Turkish activists

KAOS GL / We Want Freedom Campaign: Yildiz Tar +90 541 672 1764 (prefers Whatsapp communications instead of email)
Amnesty Turkey: Esra Koçak (Comms) +90 544 480 09 35
Human Rights Watch: Deniz Bayram +90 533 732 07 89 (last news from HRW: https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/10/13/turkiye-cop31-host-curbs-environment-defenders)

Contacts from individual Turkish activists forwarded by request

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