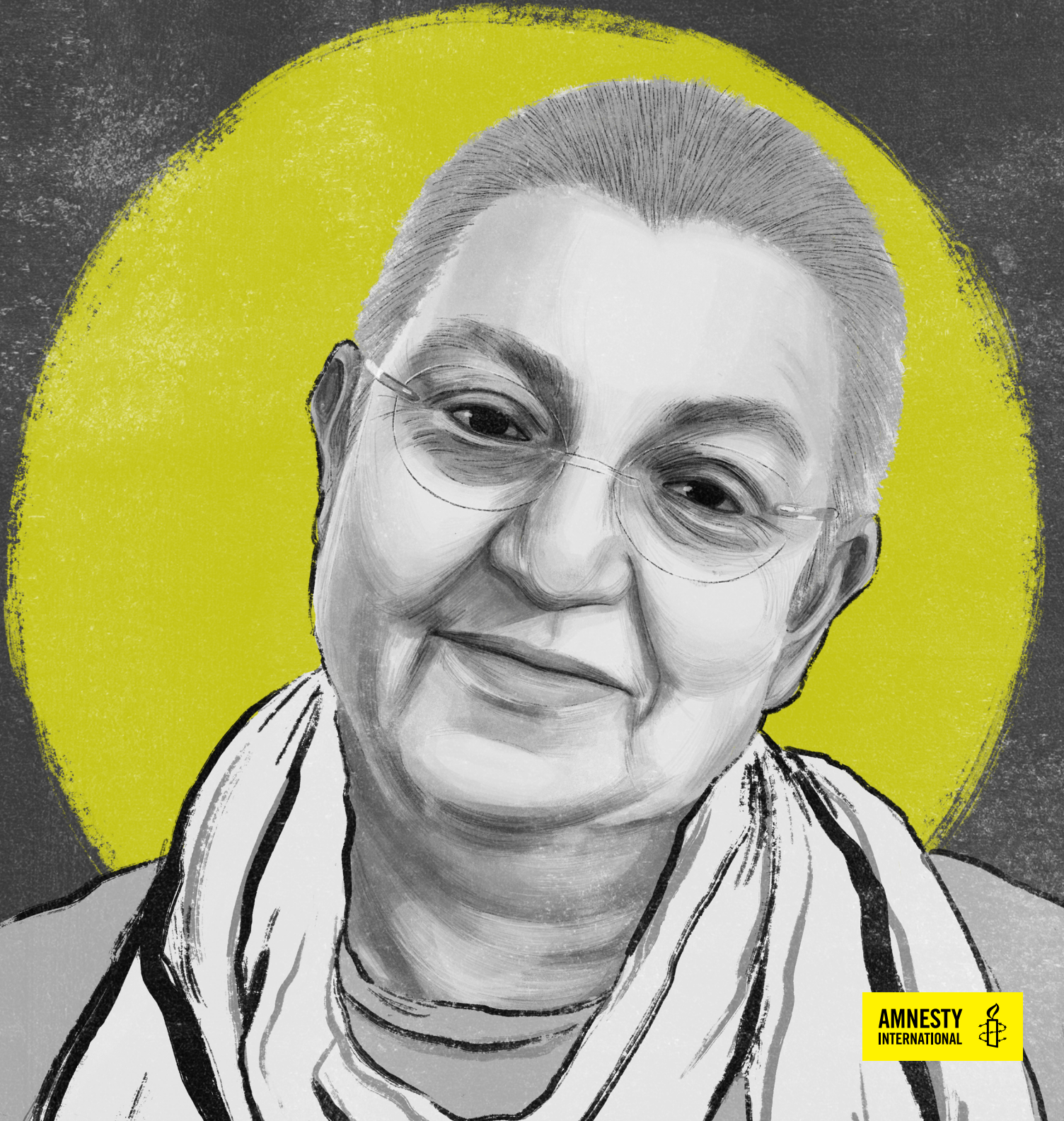


**CONVICTED FOR DEFENDING
HUMAN RIGHTS**

Şebnem Korur Fincancı, Turkey



KEY CONCEPTS

- Freedom of expression
- Human rights defenders
- Torture

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn about the vital role of human rights defenders through the story of Şebnem Korur Fincancı, a forensic medicine expert from Turkey who fights against torture. Participants will explore the ethical and legal arguments against torture and take action by writing letters to support Şebnem.

AGE

14+

TIME NEEDED

45 minutes

MATERIALS

- Papers with “TRUE” and “FALSE” written on them
- Şebnem Korur Fincancı’s story
- Papers, pens and pencils
- Torture (Background information)

PRECAUTIONS

Before starting the activities, inform participants that the topics of torture and other human rights violations can be distressing. Explain that it’s okay for participants to feel strong emotions and to take care of themselves. Create a safe, supportive environment where participants can express their thoughts and emotions. Encourage them to speak up if they are overwhelmed or need a break. Explain that participation is voluntary; they can opt out of discussions or activities if they feel uncomfortable. Avoid using graphic descriptions of torture, focusing instead on the human rights aspects and the importance of defending these rights. Ensure the discussion remains balanced, respectful and empathetic, avoiding sensationalism.

1. STOP TORTURE!

🕒 15 minutes

Tell participants that there are international laws banning torture, with strong legal, political and ethical arguments supporting these bans. Explain that you will now read out some statements. Instruct participants to position themselves in the room according to whether they think the statements are true or false. Designate one side of the room for “True” and the opposite side for “False”. Participants should position themselves in the middle if they are unsure or think the statement is partially true.

Read each statement clearly and give participants a moment to think about their response. Once participants are in position, ask some volunteers to explain their positions, then provide the correct answer and the explanation.

STATEMENTS:

1. Some forms of torture are allowed under certain circumstances, like emergencies or matters of national security.

False: *International human rights laws, including the UN Convention against Torture (1984) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), prohibit torture under all circumstances, including during emergencies or to protect national security. There are no exceptions.*

2. Preventing people from sleeping (sleep deprivation) is a form of torture.

True: *Sleep deprivation is recognized as a form of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by the UN. When we think of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, we often think of things like stress positions, electric shocks and waterboarding, and these barbaric practices do happen routinely in many countries. But such abuses can also include things like inhumane prison conditions, solitary confinement and denial of medical treatment .*

3. Torture helps the authorities to get fast, reliable and accurate information from people.

False: *Victims of torture may provide false or misleading information simply to stop the pain, making the intelligence gathered through torture often unreliable. There are cases where people’s convictions have been overturned when it was discovered that information had been extracted from them under torture.*

4. Torture can lead to long-term psychological trauma for victims.

True: *Torture often causes long-term psychological issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety.*

5. In practice, torture is generally limited to issues around national security and counterterrorism.

False: *It is a common misconception that torture is generally limited to issues around national security and counterterrorism. But Amnesty International's research shows that it could happen to anyone – petty criminals, people from ethnic minorities, protesters, student activists and people who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. It is most often poor and marginalized people who are beaten, humiliated or subjected to or threatened with rape or other sexual violence by police and other officials when there is no one to protect them or hear their cries for help.*

Terrorism has not been defined in a consistent way in global treaties or other sources of general international law. Our research demonstrates that some governments invoke broad definitions of terrorism in order to repress political opposition.

To close this part and debrief, ask participants to reflect on the following question:
Why is it important to step up against all forms of torture?

2. ŞEBNEM KORUR FİNCANCI'S STORY

🕒 15 minutes

Inform the participants that now they will learn about an outstanding human rights defender and a leading figure in the fight against torture who is in grave danger of being unlawfully imprisoned and fined.

- Distribute copies of Şebnem's story.
- After reading the story, discuss the following:
- What comes to mind when reading Şebnem's story?
- Why do you think the Turkish government is harassing and intimidating Şebnem?
- Do you feel that people like Şebnem, who fight for human rights, should be protected? Why?

3. TAKE ACTION

🕒 15 minutes

Explain about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty International is encouraging people to show their support for Şebnem in her fight to protect people's rights in Turkey. They can send her their message of solidarity and hope. Be creative!

Şebnem speaks English. Here are some example messages to include:

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL 

I stand with you, Prof Şebnem Korur Fincancı. Defending human rights should never be a crime. Thank you for all your amazing work, we are in full solidarity with you.

Please avoid colours that the authorities associate with the Kurdish movement – red, gold and green together.

ŞEBNEM KORUR FINCANCI'S STORY

At home, Professor Şebnem Korur Fincancı enjoys spending time with her cats, Simone and Ulula, cooking and listening to music. Beethoven is her favourite composer.

To the world, Şebnem is an expert in forensic medicine, renowned for her work to eradicate torture. She has contributed to the development of a UN protocol on the investigation of torture, and a handbook on sexual violence for the World Health Organization. Until June 2024, she was the head of the Turkish Medical Association. Şebnem has also continually fought to protect the human rights of people in Türkiye, including their right to freedom of expression.

In a bid to silence her and stop her important work, for years the Turkish authorities have subjected Şebnem to baseless criminal investigations, detention and prosecutions. In January 2023 she was convicted for allegedly “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” after she called for an investigation into allegations that the Turkish military was using chemical weapons in Iraq. Şebnem is appealing against her conviction but could be imprisoned for almost two years if her appeal is unsuccessful.

The Turkish government is cracking down on people’s freedom of expression and restricting the work of human rights defenders like Şebnem. But Şebnem refuses to give in to their intimidation. Undeterred by the hostility she faces, she says: “I have never had the habit of bowing to any authority to this day.