

25 September 2019



DA VENIAM SCRIPTIS QUORUM NON GLORIA NOBIS
CAUSA, SED UTILITAS OFFICIUMQUE FUIT

The Honorable Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
President of the Republic of Turkey

The Honorable Abdulhamit Gül
Justice Minister
Republic of Turkey

Cumhurbaşkanlığı Külliyesi 06560
Beştepe-Ankara
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Dear President Erdoğan and Justice Minister Gül

We write to you on behalf of the Collegium Ramazzini, an independent, international, learned society consisting of 180 physicians and scientists from 35 countries expert in environmental and occupational medicine. The mission of the Collegium Ramazzini is to increase scientific knowledge of the environmental and occupational causes of disease and to transmit this information to decision-makers, the health professions and the global public in order to prevent disease, promote good health and save lives.

The Collegium Ramazzini expresses grave concern over the prosecution of Dr. Bulent Şık, a distinguished food engineer, for announcing the findings of a cancer research study in which he participated that was conducted by the Turkish Ministry of Health.

The Collegium Ramazzini calls upon Dr. Şık's acquittal and the termination of this unwarranted and unjust investigation that violates Dr. Şık's human rights. Dr. Şık fulfilled his ethical duty as a health professional and warned the people of Turkey of a serious hazard to their health and the health of their children. In so doing, he committed no crime.

Dr. Şık is a leading expert in the measurement and analysis of toxic chemicals in environmental and food samples. He was responsible between 2011 and 2015 in his prior capacity as the Deputy Director of the Food Safety and Agricultural Research Center at Akdeniz University for conducting analyses of carcinogenic chemicals in thousands of food samples as well as in surface water and groundwater samples. Dr. Şık undertook these analyses as part of a research project run and funded by the Ministry of Health. The project involved five Turkish cities, four of which had abnormally high cancer incidence.

The main finding of the study was that health-threatening levels of pesticides, heavy metals, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons are present in multiple food and water samples in these Turkish cities. In some residential areas, the water is undrinkable because of high levels of lead, aluminum, chrome and arsenic pollution.

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In 2018, three years after the conclusion of this investigation, no results had yet been released to the Turkish public by the Ministry of Health, nor had any precautions been taken to alert the public to the hazard or to alleviate the serious threats to public health that were revealed by this government-sponsored research.

To call attention to this serious threat and to provide Turkish citizens with information that they could use to protect their health and the health of their families from this ongoing danger, Dr. Şık promulgated the findings for which he was responsible in the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* on April 16-19, 2018. In consequence of this action, Dr. Şık has been accused for disclosing privileged information acquired in the course of duty; and of divulging classified information. He now potentially faces a prison sentence of 5-12 years.

The Collegium Ramazzini has been following Dr Şık's court case since February 2019. We previously released a public statement in support of his case. We believe that in promulgating the results of this study Dr. Şık acted in good faith and scientific integrity on behalf of the public interest and within the scope of his constitutional rights with the sole aim of protecting public health. We also note that the truthfulness of his findings has not been challenged by any authority or individual.

Dr Şık's scientific contributions should be seen as crucial to the promotion of public and environmental health both for Turkey and the international community. His study is especially important for the protection of children's health, given that children have been shown to be much more susceptible than adults to carcinogenic exposures in food and drinking water. Dr Şık's scientific findings indicate the need for preventive measures to reduce exposure to risks for future generations.

We understand that Dr. Şık will have his next court hearing at Çağlayan Justice Palace, Istanbul on September 26, 2019.

The Collegium Ramazzini calls the immediate acquittal of Dr. Şık at this upcoming hearing and for the termination of this unjust investigation. It is our professional opinion that Dr. Şık behaved ethically within the scope of his profession and that he was attempting in good faith to fulfill his sworn duty to humanity by publicizing scientific findings that should have been promulgated three years earlier by the Ministry of Health.

The continuation of this unwarranted investigation violates Dr. Şık's human rights. It is incompatible with Turkey's sworn obligation to protect and ensure Dr. Şık's rights to freedom of opinion and expression, rights that are enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights.

We respectfully call Dr. Bülent Şık's acquittal and and very much hope that justice will be allowed to prevail.

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