

We demand freedom for Monk Aho, Sefer Bilcen

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Monk Aho

In yesterday's hearing, Syriac Christian monk Sefer (Aho) Bilecen of Mor Yakup Monastery in Turabdin region, southeast Turkey sentenced to 2 years and 1 month to prison by Mardin local court. Monk Aho was taken into custody briefly in January 2020, released later but an indictment was prepared upon his dossier. While the hearing held at the Mardin 4h Heavy Penal Court was not attended by priest Bilecen, his attorney was present in the courtroom.

To note, Sefer (Aho) Bilecen, the monk of Mor Yakup Monastery, was detained along with 10 others in Nusaybin, Mardin on January 9, 2020. Arrested a day later, he was released on January 14 upon the objection to his arrest. Along with him, 12 people, including Üçköy village head Joseph Yar and Musa Taştekin, a Syriac citizen who returned to Turkey after years, were detained.

This decision concerning Monk Aho is a blow to Democratic principles and human rights and protection of minorities and vulnerable groups. Syriac monasteries of Turabdin are attractive centers of tourist visits besides their cultural and religious importance of Syriac people. Monasteries and churches are open for all segments of populations without the restriction of religion and belief. Monk Aho, as a dedicated person to service, was available for everybody and he is still guardian of the monastery.

Syriac people around the world follow this issue closely and with great attention. The court decision is a disappointment for Syriacs and they will react to this unjust decision. Our expectation from our world and the Christian world to support Monk Aho in this case.

ESU calls on Turkish authorities to drop all charges against Monk Aho Sefer Bilecen and end this process. We believe the international community, humane and minority rights organizations should follow and support Monk Aho until he reaches his freedom.

