

PUBLIC

AI Index: EUR 44/014/2005

20 April 2005

UA 94/05 Death threats/Fear for safety

TURKEY Eren Keskin (f)] members of the *Insan Haklari Dernegi* (IHD), Human Rights
Saban Dayanan (m)] Association
Dogan Genç (m)]

Three members of the Human Rights Association (IHD) have received death threats, and Amnesty International believes they are in grave danger.

Eren Keskin is head of the organization's Istanbul branch. Saban Dayanan is its secretary, and Dogan Genç is a coordinator of the IHD's activities in the Marmara region, which includes Istanbul.

All three received threatening letters at their home and work addresses on 19 April, from an ultra-nationalist group called the Turkish Revenge Brigade (*Türk Intikam Tugayı*). This group claimed responsibility for an armed attack in 1998 on the then IHD president, Akin Birdal, in which he was critically wounded.

Recently there has been a surge of ultra-nationalist activity in Turkey, after a group of children attempted to burn a Turkish flag in the city of Mersin, south-eastern Turkey on 21 March. This incident sparked off nationwide demonstrations across the country to show support for the Turkish flag. Turkey's most senior military officer described the perpetrators as "so-called citizens". On 6 April, five activists distributing leaflets in the northern city of Trabzon, protesting against solitary confinement and isolation in Turkey's prisons, were reportedly nearly lynched by a mob who thought they were burning a Turkish flag. There have been a number of similar incidents throughout Turkey since then.

The letters from the Turkish Revenge Brigade refer to the flag-burning, and say that every provision must be made to protect the Turkish flag, "...a symbol of a nation's history written with blood...". They also refer to the May 1998 attempt by the Turkish Revenge Brigade to assassinate Akin Birdal, who was shot and critically injured by two members of the group, at the IHD headquarters in Istanbul. The letters say that the recipients may not be as lucky as he was to survive.

Eren Keskin has been receiving death threats for years. These increased when she represented Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the armed opposition group the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). (For details see UA 92/01, EUR 44/022/2001 and follow-up.) She has been prosecuted many times for her activities in defence of human rights. Most recently, on 5 April a court in the eastern town of Tunceli sentenced her to five months' imprisonment for a speech she had made in November 2002, to a conference in the town on "The Role of Women in Society". In her speech she had said that, in her opinion, torture in Turkey was systematic, and that all female inmates were subjected at some point to some form of sexual harassment while in prison. The sentence was handed down in accordance with Article 159 of the Turkish Penal Code for "insulting and belittling the Turkish state and its security forces" and was subsequently converted to a fine of 1,050 New Turkish Lira (about US\$770). Saban Dayanan was stabbed by a man who forced his way into the IHD's Istanbul office in November 2001, armed with a pistol and a knife, and threatened to kill everyone working there. (For details see UA 272/01, EUR 44/076/2001 and follow up.)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The IHD, founded in 1986, is Turkey's largest human rights organization. It has been outspoken in its condemnation of human rights violations and abuses by both the government and armed opposition groups,

and has therefore found itself repeatedly targeted for attack. Its officials have been threatened, arrested, prosecuted, tortured, abducted and killed; its offices have been ransacked, closed and bombed. At least 12 IHD representatives have been killed since 1991. In most cases the killers have never been identified, and members of the Turkish security forces have been strongly implicated in some of the killings. Several branches have been closed on various pretexts. There was immediate worldwide condemnation of the May 1998 attempt to assassinate Akin Birdal, and Amnesty International believes the Turkish authorities created the climate for the attack by trying to link the IHD to the outlawed PKK.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- urging the Turkish authorities to ensure the safety of Eren Keskin, Saban Dayanan and Dogan Genç and to investigate the death threats they have received;
- asking that human rights defenders are allowed to pursue their lawful role of monitoring and reporting on human rights matters, as set out in the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Defenders Declaration;
- calling on the authorities to take effective action to ensure that the security forces and other public servants recognize the legitimacy of the work of human rights defenders.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of the Interior

Mr Abdulkadir Aksu

Ministry of Interior

Icisleri Bakanligi

Ankara, Turkey

Fax: + 90 312 418 1795

Email: aaksu@icisleri.gov.tr

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

State Minister with responsibility for Human Rights

Mr Abdullah Gül,

Office of the Prime Minister,

Başbakanlık,

06573 Ankara, Turkey

Fax: + 90 312 287 8811

E-mail: abduallah.gul@basbakanlik.gov.tr

and to diplomatic representatives of Turkey accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 June 2005.