

AI INDEX: EUR 44/15/97

EMBARGOED FOR 9:30 GMT WEDNESDAY 5 MARCH 1997

EU Member States: silent witnesses to Turkey's human rights record

Brussels --The European Union (EU) must take the lead to deal with Turkey's appalling human rights record, Amnesty International said today.

"For years the EU has refused to take action on Turkey in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights which begins its next session on 10 March. Perceived security and political interests are preventing concrete action at the Commission," the human rights organization said.

Amnesty International calls on the EU to table a resolution critical of the human rights situation in Turkey. "This is not a time for complacency. The EU must act to persuade the Turkish Government to invite the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions and the Working Group on Disappearances to visit Turkey in 1997 and report back to the 1998 Commission".

Despite a wealth of hard evidence about systematic human rights violations in Turkey, the European Union has been silent until now on whether it will take action at the UN Commission.

"This cannot be allowed to continue," Amnesty International said. "No country can escape scrutiny by the UN Commission."

The human rights situation in Turkey has deteriorated throughout the 1990s. Torture is widespread and systematic. Most disturbing is the increase in reports of torture of children in 1995 and 1996. Extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" and arbitrary detention continue with ever stronger evidence of state involvement and collusion at the highest official levels.

The Turkish Government has failed to implement scores of detailed recommendations for change made by intergovernmental experts over the years. It has also failed to answer repeated requests by several UN human rights experts to visit the country, and has ignored the recommendations of expert bodies such as the UN Committee against Torture.

"Only last December the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture expressed its deep frustration in its second public statement on torture in four years," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International welcomes initiatives by the European Parliament aimed at improving the human rights situation in Turkey and the inclusion of a chapter on the human rights situation in the European Commission's report of October 1996 on relations with the country. At the same time, the organization regrets that the European Commission does not propose sufficient

concrete initiatives to combat human rights violations, in spite of its recognition of the seriousness of the situation.

As further concrete steps, Amnesty International calls on the EU to seriously strengthen the scope of its support to Turkish human rights defenders.

"The European Union should also actively promote training programmes for Turkish police and gendarmerie forces in the field of human rights, and monitor the effectiveness of these programmes. Moreover, it should establish an EU presence in the regions of Turkey under state of emergency, in order to monitor and report on human rights abuses by security forces and armed opposition groups," the organization said.

Amnesty International calls on the EU to adopt a proactive approach in dealing with the human rights situation in Turkey. This should include bilateral initiatives by the Member States, as well as EU initiatives and joint EU action in European organizations and UN human rights bodies.

"For too long the UN Commission on Human Rights has failed to act on Turkey's appalling human rights record. Reports by the Commission's own human rights experts have been repeatedly ignored. The EU has encouraged this trend by failing to act," Amnesty International said.

"If the EU does not take adequate steps to improve the human rights situation in Turkey and does not act at the UN Commission on Human Rights, it will be failing the thousands of victims in Turkey and allowing the recommendations of UN expert bodies -- which the EU played such a prominent role in establishing -- to be ignored," Amnesty International said.

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- *Amnesty International has documented the human rights situation in Turkey for more than three decades. In October 1996 it launched a worldwide campaign on human rights violations in the country.*
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