

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 44/018/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 105
22 April 2005

Turkey: Justice denied to tortured teenage girls

Amnesty International today called for Turkey's Court of Appeal to urgently re-examine the case of four police officers acquitted of the torture and rape of two teenage girls after a massively delayed and grossly inadequate investigation and trial.

"This trial has already taken over four years and has been postponed more than 30 times," said James Logan, researcher on Turkey at Amnesty International. "For it to be dismissed at this stage over an entirely bogus technicality is abominable. Justice has not been served."

The police officers had been charged with subjecting Nazime Ceren Salmanoglu, then 16 years old, and Fatma Deniz Polattas, then 19 years old, to horrific torture including rape with serrated objects, beatings, suspension by the arms, and forced "virginity tests" in early March 1999. The women say they were also denied food and drink, prevented from sleeping or using the toilet, and forced to strip and remain naked in a cold room. Confessions regarding their membership in the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) obtained during the torture, were used to sentence both women to long prison terms. Nazime Ceren Salmanoglu was released at the end of last year under changes made to the Turkish penal code. Fatma Deniz Polattas is still in prison.

The court today dismissed the case against the police officers because of "insufficient evidence", based on the General Board of the Forensic Medical Institute's assessment that the psychiatric reports submitted did not constitute valid evidence. This is unacceptable for several reasons: first and most critically because at least one of the doctors on the Board had previously received disciplinary punishment for covering up torture. In addition, many members of the Board are not specialists in these types of cases, and in any case an expert committee from the Institute had previously determined that this evidence was indeed valid.

Extraordinary delays have marked the judicial proceedings from the outset and only after extensive psychiatric evaluations corroborated the allegations did the trial finally begin on 14 April 2000. The court then waited 28 months for medical reports to be forwarded from Turkey's Forensic Medical Institute.

Amnesty International urges the Court of Appeals to reverse this decision to allow investigations and prosecution to take place and bring those responsible for these violent crimes to justice.

"The Turkish justice system has failed victims of human rights violations once again," said James Logan. "If the Court allows this decision to stand, it will be sending the clearest message yet that the state sanctions violence and brutality committed by police and security officers."

For background information please see press releases *Turkey: Kurdish girls raped and sexually abused in*

police custody, 19 November 1999, and *Turkey: Insufficient and inadequate -- judicial remedies against torturers and killers*, 16 November 2004.

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