

AI INDEX: EUR 44/31/99
28 April 1999

Media Advisory
Turkey
Amnesty International to send trial observer

Amnesty International is sending a trial observer to Turkey from 28 April to 1 May. The Amnesty International delegate will observe, among others, the trial of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan and that of a group of policemen charged with having tortured trade unionist Süleyman Yeter, journalist Bayram Namaz and 13 other detainees in early 1997 at the anti-terror branch of the Istanbul Police Headquarters.

The trial against Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the outlawed PKK arrested in Kenya and remanded on the Turkish island of Imrali, triggered off a general discussion about fair trial questions among lawyers and human rights defenders in Turkey. Amnesty International expressed concern that Öcalan did not have access to a lawyer until 10 days after his detention. The organization asked the Turkish Prime Minister to ensure that Öcalan will receive a fair trial.

In the session on 30 April, the indictment for the main trial is expected to be publicly introduced. Öcalan's lawyers will explain why they think that the interrogation made on Imrali island is invalid and they will address what they think are breaches of Turkish procedural law and international standards for fair trial. After the last session held on 24 March at Ankara State Security Court, the lawyers had to leave the court through a window because they were threatened by an angry crowd.

In the case of the policeman facing charges of torture, the Court decided to call the defendants to a hearing on 29 April 1999 in order to be identified by the complainants. Süleyman Yeter and Bayram Namaz had received invitations to this hearing. However, on 5 March, both men were again detained in Istanbul Police Headquarters.

Süleyman Yeter died in custody on 7 March apparently as a result of torture. In a press release dated 24 March 1999, the Istanbul Bar Association expressed its fear that Süleyman Yeter's final detention might have been related to this trial and directed at impeding the identification. They emphasized that the policemen in question are employed in the branch where Süleyman Yeter lost his life in custody.

Bayram Namaz -- who is a complainant in this trial -- also complained to the Prosecutor about Süleyman Yeter's death and has subsequently been harassed and threatened by the police.
ENDS.../

Amnesty International has just launched a report on impunity in Turkey, calling for sound investigations into cases of torture. The report demonstrates that only a realistic fear of prosecution will inhibit further human rights violations.

For further information, to request a copy of the report or to arrange an interview, please phone Amnesty International's Press Office on +44 171 413 5566. ISDN available.