

AI INDEX: EUR 44/53/97
9 JULY 1997

Turkey: Deaths at Istanbul prison as gendarmes brought in to quell disturbance

Amnesty International is disturbed at reports that five prisoners died and five others were seriously injured in disturbances at Metris Prison in Istanbul last night.

Lawyers and human rights activists in Istanbul are still unable to obtain firm information about what took place in the prison, but according to the Turkish Justice Ministry, gendarmes were brought in to restore order after disturbances among ordinary criminal prisoners in the course of which the prison administration building was destroyed by fire.

“If this information is true, then we again call on the Turkish authorities to stop the mounting toll of death and injuries in prison by ensuring that remand and convicted prisoners are not brought into contact with police and gendarmes,” Amnesty International said today.

Nine prisoners have died in the course of prison disturbances since 1994, and of these eight were beaten to death. Twelve prisoners died during a hunger-strike over prison conditions during the summer of 1996.

Fatalities occur particularly when gendarmes are brought in to quell prisoner protests. The organization wrote to the Justice Ministry in July 1996, urging that sufficient resources be allocated so that prison services are not required to call upon Interior Ministry security forces -- police and gendarmes -- to handle such crises.

Turkey's 562 prisons hold more than 50,000 prisoners of whom approximately two thirds are convicted prisoners. Of the total prison population, about 8,000 are held on political charges. Metris Prison holds a small number of political prisoners, mostly from religious and right-wing groups.
ENDS\