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**TURKEY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGES TURKISH PARLIAMENT TO HALT
DETERIORATION IN HUMAN RIGHTS**

The Turkish Government should act now to stop the deterioration in human rights in that country, Amnesty International said today.

On 23 July the Turkish parliament enacted a number of reforms to the Turkish constitution. Not one of the 12 much-publicized changes addresses Turkey's fundamental human rights problems.

"We are disappointed that the government's recent constitutional changes do not address Turkey's fundamental human rights problems, despite strong promises to tackle its disastrous record," the organization said today.

While the number of prisoners of conscience, deaths in custody as a result of torture, and "disappearances" are on the increase, the Turkish parliament has congratulated itself on such reforms as reducing the voting age and changing the parliamentary calendar.

Amnesty International has for years campaigned for three basic legislative changes which would help to bring Turkey in line with international standards and provide safeguards against the most serious violations.

"The Turkish parliament should make three simple changes to the penal code which could help to protect Turkish citizens from torture, "disappearance" and imprisonment for expressing non-violent opinions," Amnesty International stated.

- * abolish or reform of articles of the penal code under which prisoners of conscience are held
- * extend to all detainees the right of access to lawyer and family
- * shorten the maximum term of police custody

Currently scores of people are imprisoned or threatened with imprisonment for up to five years for expressing non-violent opinions under Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law, which outlaws any statement deemed as damaging to the unitary Turkish state.

The former mayor of Diyarbakır Mehdi Zana is currently serving more than 12 years in sentences under Article 8 for various statements, including a speech he made to the Human Rights Sub-Committee of the European Parliament.

Such prosecutions are violations of Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms to which Turkey is a state party.

In 1994 there were at least 29 deaths in custody as a result of torture, and two deaths in custody in suspicious circumstances. Sinan Demirba_ died on 21 July after 13 days incommunicado interrogation for suspected draft evasion at Elazig Police Headquarters. His father reported seeing cigarette burns on his son's arms. Police claim that Sinan Demirba_ died as a result of beating his head against his cell walls and falling down the stairs at the hospital he was taken to four days before his death.

Amnesty International believes this death could have been prevented by giving access to legal counsel and bringing detainees promptly before a judge, as required by Article 5 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

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