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TURKEY: PRISONERS ON HUNGER-STRIKE CLOSE TO DEATH -- STOP
ILL-TREATMENT OF PRISONERS, SAYS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

As the seven-week hunger-strike in some 35 Turkish prisons reaches a critical phase -- with many prisoners' lives in danger -- Amnesty International is urgently calling on the Turkish authorities to stop the ill-treatment of prisoners.

Hundreds of political prisoners are now participating in the hunger-strike which began in Diyarbakır E-Type Prison on 25 April 1996. Among the prisoners' demands are: an end to ill-treatment and obstruction of medical treatment.

"We have repeatedly raised these issues with successive governments in Turkey, and still the authorities continue to abuse prisoners -- often beating them to death," Amnesty International said today. "Must these hunger-strikers die before the government puts an end to such attacks?"

On 6 June a doctor examining prisoners who had been transferred from Diyarbakır to Gaziantep prison reported that several prisoners were close to coma and traces of beatings were found on six of them.

Although torture for the purpose of extracting information or confessions is very widely practised in police stations, there is no such pattern in prisons. However, severe and sometimes fatal beatings of remand and convicted prisoners are frequently reported. Three prisoners were beaten to death at Buca Prison in Izmir in September 1995, and four prisoners died of beatings at Ümraniye Prison in Istanbul in January 1996.

Most such beatings are inflicted by police and gendarmes on political prisoners when they are being transported by gendarmes for trial or medical treatment, or alternatively, when gendarmes and police are brought into prisons to quell prisoners' protests. Police and gendarmes take these opportunities to "punish" alleged or convicted members of illegal armed organizations.

Amnesty International has repeatedly appealed to the Turkish authorities to put a swift end to such abuses simply by ensuring that remand and convicted prisoners are never brought into contact with police and gendarmes. Once a prisoner is formally arrested by a court they pass from the authority of the Interior Ministry (responsible for police and gendarmerie) into that of the Justice Ministry (responsible for prison service). The Justice Ministry should be given sufficient resources to ensure that there is no need to call upon Interior Ministry security forces to handle prison business.

Members of Amnesty International's network of health professionals have also recently raised a number of cases of alleged medical neglect of prisoners with the General Director of Prisons and the Ministry of Justice. In one such case, for many months treatment was effectively denied to a young woman who had suffered severe neurological damage to her arms resulting in almost complete loss of movement as a result of being suspended by the arms in police custody. Gendarmes have repeatedly failed to take her to appointments.

On 7 June members of the Turkish Human Rights Association who went to Istanbul post office to send telegrams of protest to the Minister of Justice were taken into custody, and the President of the Istanbul Human Rights Association branch, Ercan Kanar, was roughly treated. Members of prisoners' families staging non-violent protests in sympathy with the hunger-strike have also been ill-treated and detained for hours or days.

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