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TURKEY: ARRESTED PARTY OFFICIALS ARE PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE, SAYS
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International today called for the immediate release of 39 officials of the People's Democracy Party (HADEP), most of whom are Kurdish and who were detained last month following their party congress in Ankara.

“There are no grounds for the Turkish authorities to detain these people who were simply attending the congress of a legal party which does not in any way advocate violence,” Amnesty International said today.

“We consider them to be prisoners of conscience and as such, we call for their immediate and unconditional release.”

The detentions on 23 June, which included the party president Murat Bozlak, were triggered when a group of masked youths reportedly burst into the congress hall, tore down the Turkish flag and put up a banner of the illegal Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) in its place. Those arrested do not appear to have been responsible for tearing down the Turkish flag.

The HADEP members -- who were formally arrested on 4 July and committed to Ankara Closed Prison -- were held in police custody for 10 days, in clear breach of Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights which states that detainees should be brought “promptly” before a judge, a provision intended as a protection against torture. It is alleged that the detainees were subjected to ill-treatment and torture. Seven of them were reportedly severely tortured -- they include the woman lawyer Kudret Gözütok who was chairing the congress at the time of the incident. Amnesty International will be investigating these allegations.

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