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“NO SECURITY WITHOUT HUMAN RIGHTS”

**PRESS CONFERENCE STATEMENT BY
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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**

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(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

I have been in Turkey for a week now, and it has been a dark week for human rights in many parts of the world.

A week in which Amnesty International called for civilians to be protected in the clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. Has spoken out against the detention of pro-democracy activists in Myanmar. Urged international pressure in Afghanistan to prevent further human rights abuses in the wake of the overthrow of the government. And called for an investigation into the questionable killing of an IRA member by the police in the United Kingdom.

I am telling you this because in the past week my colleagues and I have been asked time and time again why Amnesty is, once more, singling out Turkey for human rights criticism when abuses take place around the world.

On the day that Amnesty launches a campaign on human rights in Turkey, I therefore want to make absolutely clear to journalists, politicians and the public in this country that even as we speak on abuses here we are not silent on violations elsewhere.

I also want you to be clear about my answer to another common question:

Why has Amnesty International chosen to launch a campaign against Turkey now?

I have two responses.

This first response is that this is not a campaign against Turkey.

This is a campaign FOR the human rights of all people in Turkey and in support of all those in the country who are working for a genuine human rights order.

The second response is that this, and previous, Turkish governments have themselves, in effect, chosen Turkey for a human rights campaign.

They have done so by signing international human rights standards and proclaiming abroad that human rights are a priority, and then covering up torture, “disappearances” and political killings.

By showing a lack of courage and commitment to change bad laws and bad practices and by failing to bring to justice the soldiers and police officers who torture children and gun down civilians.

Today we are saying that enough is enough.

That it is time to end the decades of endemic torture and restrictions on the freedom of expression and the more recent phenomenon of “disappearances” and extrajudicial executions.

That it is time for Turkish governments to stop arguing that the violation of human rights is necessary to maintain national security and to blame all such abuses on the conflict in the southeast.

That it is time to stop confusing the interests of national security with the interests of the security establishment.

The conflict has had a devastating effect on the southeast. The loss of life on all sides is a genuine tragedy, none more so than for the civilians who have been caught literally and figuratively in the crossfire between the army and the **PKK**.

The **PKK** have been responsible for human rights abuses -- like the torture and killing of civilians -- which Amnesty unequivocally condemns.

And in all this the real victims have been the civilians -- caught literally and figuratively in the crossfire between the army and the **PKK**.

But the reality is that human rights violations take place throughout the country and that an end to the conflict alone would not see an end to the killing of journalists, the torture of children, and the “disappearance” of activists.

The police and security forces -- long operating with a sense of impunity -- would find a new pretext and new targets for their abuses.

In the southeast, a woman -- Nuray Sen -- was detained last year for 10 days charged with supporting the **PKK**. Ten days during which her head was punched against a wall, an officer shoved his boot into her mouth, and a wooden truncheon was pressed against her genitals.

In Istanbul, 36-year-old construction worker Fehmi Tosun was last seen a year ago, when he was dragged from outside his home by three plainclothes police officers. He has now joined the ranks of the “disappeared”, and his wife and daughters are among those who are left in the dark about their loved ones.

And a 12-year-old girl in Ankara was picked up last year on suspicion of stealing bread. The price she paid was five days in the police station, cut off from the outside world, and tortured with electric shocks.

In none of these cases have the perpetrators been brought to justice.

But the fact that the human rights situation has gone from bad to worse in the 1990s will not be news to you.

Everyone that we have met this past week -- from human rights groups to businessmen, trade unionists to members of parliament -- agrees that there is a serious human rights problem in Turkey.

Most everyone admits that the continuing trial of 185 writers, publishers and intellectuals is an outrage and an embarrassment.

And one member of parliament even made the frank admission that he would be afraid of being taken into police custody!

They also agree that something finally needs to be done to turn around the human rights situation.

For our part, we are putting forward a set of 13 recommendations for simple and practical reforms including:

- abolish incommunicado detention and shorten the 30 day maximum period of police detention as a step towards eradicating torture
- make sure that all detainees are properly registered, as a safeguard against “disappearances”, and investigate all cases of past “disappearances” and extrajudicial executions
- reform or repeal Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law to make sure that freedom of expression is a genuine right for all citizens

To date, successive Turkish governments have acted as if the country’s appalling human rights record was little more than a public relations problem, as shown by President Demirel’s comment last year:

“In its foreign relations, Turkey is increasingly facing a human rights problem....These problems will begin to have repercussions in the economic and military spheres.”

For the most part, however, the fears of the Turkish government have not been realized. The governments of the international community know what is happening, and have put woefully little pressure on Turkey to improve its human rights record.

Turkey has a strategic position as the border guard of the west, and is regarded by NATO nations in particular as a vital front-line ally whose situation merits “special understanding”. If Turkish governments have flouted their international obligations and failed their own people in protecting human rights, then so have those countries with influential ties.

In launching this campaign, then, we are sending a message to both the Turkish and other governments that we will be lobbying from around the world to end the erosion of human rights in Turkey.

But we are also sending a message to the activists, professionals and journalists we have met this week, and others in civil society who are building up pressure within the country for change.

Ultimately, human rights protection must be demanded by the citizens of any country. And we have seen that determined relatives, courageous journalists, and persistent human rights defenders are doing so in Turkey. In this campaign, our voice will be heard along side yours and our solidarity will be extended from around the world.

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