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Turkey: The women who have spoken out

The following information is an extract from Amnesty International's report *Turkey: End sexual violence against women in custody!* (EUR 44/006/2003).

S.Y. was detained at Istanbul Police Headquarters between 24 and 27 September 2002. She was reportedly blindfolded and subjected to torture, which included sexual assault. One police officer reportedly made her open her mouth and spat into it. Grabbed by the hair and thrown to the ground, beaten and insulted, she was then made to strip. A police officer also stripped and rubbed his hands and penis against her, after which she was taken naked to the toilet and sprayed with cold pressurized water. S.Y. reported that on the last day she was in custody, she was stripped naked and sexually assaulted again. She alleged that she was threatened with anal rape using the hose from the pressurized water, and that police attempted to insert the hose into her anus.

Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of women being sexually tortured while in police and gendarmerie detention in Turkey. S.Y., whose name is known to Amnesty International, is just one of them. Their search for justice is difficult and numerous factors conspire to allow such cases to remain uninvestigated and the perpetrators to go unpunished.

Lawyers representing women in Turkey who have been sexually assaulted in custody have been subjected to official, media, and peer persecution. This makes it even more difficult for survivors of sexual violence to obtain justice, and contributes to the silence surrounding sex crimes. Eren Keskin - a human rights defender who acts for women who have been subjected to sexual violence in custody - has been the subject of 86 lawsuits in relation to her human rights activities. She has also been the subject of death threats and insults.

For example, in one trial she was charged with "insulting the state security forces" after she publicized the sexual torture that some of her clients reported having suffered while in gendarmerie custody. In a second trial she has been charged with having disseminated "separatist propaganda" in statements made during a panel discussion on 'Violence against Women' held in Istanbul on 25 November 2001.

In November 2002, in a worrying departure from one of its traditional roles as a defender of human rights causes, the Istanbul Bar Association decided to implement a controversial decision by the Turkish Union of Bar Associations to suspend Eren Keskin's licence as a lawyer for one year as a result of a suspended conviction for making "separatist propaganda" after she used the word "Kurdistan" in a newspaper interview.

While prominent human rights defenders in Turkey like Eren Keskin who campaign and support the search by survivors of sexual torture for justice can have scores of cases opened against them for their activities, there is an apparent failure of will to bring the alleged torturers to justice.

Twenty-two-year-old Gülderen Baran was detained at the Police Headquarters in Istanbul in August 1995 and allegedly beaten, hosed naked with cold pressurized water, kept blindfolded and deprived of sleep, sexually molested and repeatedly hung by the arms which left her with a loss of movement in both arms.

As Gülderen Baran reported at the time "...they dragged me inside by my hair ... From now on I was blindfolded ... they stripped me naked and started to hang me up. They brought my shoulders to a beam and hoisted me up ... They held me under cold pressurized water ... They did not let me sleep ... For days they subjected me to countless hanging sessions. They made an unsuccessful attempt to rape me."

A trial opened against five policemen in connection with Gülderen Baran's allegations of torture was dropped - not because the police officers were found not guilty but because the trial proceedings appear to have been seriously flawed. Despite admissions of using force and beatings from a chief commissioner and a police officer during the course of their trial, the case was discontinued on 12 March 2002. It was reported to Amnesty International that many of the court sessions were adjourned by the court at the request of lawyers for the police officers. Reasons for this adjournment included the non-attendance of the defendants and their failure to provide photographs of themselves for identification purposes. One of the officers on trial, who was not suspended from his duties whilst proceedings against him were pending and who was subsequently promoted to chief superintendent, has been the beneficiary of the expiry of the statute of limitations in two trials in which he has been charged with torture.

Amnesty International believes that any public officer accused of torture or similar human rights violations must be afforded the presumption of innocence and every facility to defend themselves in the course of a fair trial. They should also be acquitted unless their guilt has been established beyond reasonable doubt. However, against the background of doubts about the independence of courts, acquittals in some prominent cases have provoked dismay. Despite the severity of the crimes - and in contrast to the prosecution of human rights defenders - there is an apparent pattern of impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes.

Amnesty International is concerned that lengthy delays in court proceedings may contribute to impunity for perpetrators of torture - including sexual torture - and other human rights violations.

**To see the full version of the report, please visit:
<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/recent/eur440062003>**

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