

## **Europe - a bastion of human rights?**

Death during forcible deportation, torture in detention, systematic police ill-treatment, and ethnic and religious repression are just a handful of Amnesty International's concerns in Europe in the lead up to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Convention in November.

Amnesty International's latest *Concerns in Europe* bulletin describes the human rights situation in 34 countries from July to December 1999. Torture and ill-treatment were reported in 27 countries and political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, were held in 14 countries.

"While many people in Europe enjoy basic human rights, some people, including asylum-seekers and ethnic and religious minorities, continue to experience a side of Europe that runs contrary to its image as a bastion of human rights and freedom," Amnesty International said today.

"Nothing demonstrates this more than the spread and frequency of allegations of police brutality. From the United Kingdom to Azerbaijan, individuals have suffered beatings, sexual abuse, mock hangings, electric shock treatment, racist abuse and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment at the hands of police. Many of those responsible have not been brought to justice," the organization said.

In July, the European Court of Human Rights found France guilty of violating international standards on torture and fair trials in the case of Moroccan and Netherlands national Ahmed Selmouni. Although the crime took place almost nine years ago the police officers are still in their posts.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, businessman Andrija Beljo was reportedly punched in the face, beaten and kicked by three Bosnian Croat police officers at Mostar police station in August, probably in connection with his refusal to pay police officers a large sum of protection money several months earlier.

After the businessman had been released from custody, he was reportedly apprehended again by two of the police officers and a third man, and driven to a deserted mine outside town where he was again beaten and subjected to a mock execution. He was finally forced to cross the border and was detained by Croatian police who took him to Split where he is currently in pre-trial detention.

Cevat Soysal, allegedly a high-ranking member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), was forcibly returned from Moldova to Turkey in July where he was detained under charges of treason and separatism, which carry the death penalty. He was allegedly tortured in detention in Turkey in 1979 and was granted political asylum in Germany in 1997.

In August in Turkey, Cevat Soysal was again reportedly tortured with electric shocks applied to various parts of the body, hung by the arms, forced to lie naked on ice, sprayed with pressurized water, forced to take drugs, beaten and then placed in a cell so tiny he could not move or sit down and had water dripped on his head. The office of the Prime Minister has stated that a prosecution of the torturers would be inappropriate.

Cruel and dangerous methods of restraint, including deliberate blocking of the breathing passages, have been used during forcible deportations from several European countries. In Belgium, the outcome of a judicial investigation into the death by asphyxiation of Semira Adamu, within hours of an attempt to deport her in September 1998, is still unknown. In Switzerland, three police officers

and a doctor are currently under investigation in connection with the death by suffocation of Khaled Abu Zarifeh during a deportation operation in March 1999.

Prison sentences for conscientious objection to military service continue to be reported. Six men in Finland were serving prison sentences of 197 days for refusing to perform an alternative service which was punitive in length. In some cases, authorities in Greece have reportedly obstructed applications for conscientious objector status, leaving the applicants to be charged with insubordination, a charge which carries a sentence of up to four years' imprisonment.

“European countries should work harder to uphold international human rights standards and end the blight of impunity which exists for police and security forces. Respect for human rights includes bringing to justice those who violate them,” Amnesty International urged.

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