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Turkey: PKK leader Abdullah Abdullah Öcalan could face unfair trial

On the eve of the trial of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan, Amnesty International today reiterated its concern that he may not receive a fair trial in line with international standards.

The organization's concerns are in the light of serious breaches of pre-trial rights, including:

- restricted access to legal counsel. Abdullah Öcalan was only granted access to his lawyers 10 days after his arrest, and access since has been limited, with guards present. Amnesty International is calling on the Turkish authorities to ensure that communication between Abdullah Öcalan and his lawyers is kept confidential from now on, and that adequate time and facilities are provided for these meetings.

Abdullah Öcalan being prevented from attending hearings in between his arrest and the start of the main trial.

the fact that the State Prosecutor distributed his indictment to the press some days before it was given to Abdullah Öcalan and his lawyers.

On Monday 31 May, when the trial starts, Abdullah Öcalan will appear enclosed in a glass box. Amnesty International is concerned that this should not interfere with the defendant's right to communicate in confidence with his lawyers throughout the court sessions.

Abdullah Öcalan is to be tried by a State Security Court (SSC). One of the three State Security Court judges is a military judge. Amnesty International believes that a civilian should not be tried by a semi-military court. But Amnesty International notes prospective government plans to replace military judges with civilian judges in SSCs. Amnesty International urges the Turkish authorities to ensure that in the reformed SSCs, the principal of "equality of arms" will be respected.

The organization is particularly concerned that Abdullah Öcalan faces charges under Article 125 of the Turkish Penal Code, which carries the death penalty. On 20 May 1999, Abdullah Öcalan's former deputy, _emdin Sak_k, and his brother Arif Sak_k, were sentenced to death under the same charges

Abdullah Öcalan is facing. Amnesty International is opposed to the use of the death penalty under all circumstances.

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