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## Turkey accused of gross human rights violations in Gezi Park protests

Turkish authorities committed human rights violations on a massive scale in the government's attempts to crush the Gezi Park protests this summer said Amnesty International.

In a report published today the organization details the worst excesses of police violence, during the protests, the failure to bring these abuses to justice and the subsequent prosecution and harassment of those that took part.

"The attempt to smash the Gezi Park protest movement involved a string of human rights violations on a huge scale. They include the wholesale denial of the right to peaceful assembly and violations of the rights to life, liberty and the freedom from torture and ill-treatment," said Andrew Gardner, Amnesty International's expert on Turkey.

A "democratization package" announced by the Prime Minister on Monday fails to address these violations or to take any serious steps to ensure that they will not occur in the future.

Amnesty International's report, [\*Gezi Park protests: Brutal denial of the right to peaceful assembly in Turkey\*](#), details how the use of live ammunition, tear gas, water cannon, plastic bullets and beatings of protestors left more than 8,000 people injured at the scene of demonstrations. The deaths of at least three protestors have been linked to the abusive use of force by police.

The organization monitored demonstrations in Istanbul and Ankara and interviewed scores of people in four cities across Turkey who were injured by police or who were unlawfully detained, beaten or sexually assaulted during detention.

### **The report documents how:**

- Protesters and others were severely beaten resulting in one death and scores of injuries.
- Police frequently fired plastic bullets directly at protesters' heads and upper bodies;
- Tear gas canisters were routinely fired directly at protestors, bystanders and sometimes into residential buildings and medical facilities, resulting in hundreds of injuries and, according to witnesses, at least one death;
- Chemical irritants were added to water cannon supply tanks;
- Women protesters were sexually abused by law enforcement officials;
- Live ammunition was used, killing one protester

"The levels of violence used by police in the course of Gezi Park protests clearly show what happens when poorly trained, poorly supervised police officers are instructed to use force - and encouraged to use it unsparingly - safe in the knowledge that they are unlikely ever to be identified or prosecuted for their abuses," said Andrew Gardner.

The vast majority of police abuses already look likely to go unpunished, while many of those who organised and participated in the protests have been vilified, abused and now face prosecution on unfair or inflated charges. Those who assisted protestors or reported on the protests – such as doctors, lawyers, journalists and even businesses - have faced threats and harassment.

“The determination of the Turkish authorities to end the Gezi Park protests – and discourage their recurrence is clear. Their tactics of choice have been force, threats, insults and prosecution,” said Andrew Gardner.

“Hundreds of people are facing prosecution solely for their participation in the demonstrations without evidence that they themselves participated in any violent act.”

“Many of those accused of organising of the protests are being investigated under anti-terrorism legislation.”

“The Turkish government must learn to tolerate the dissenting opinions expressed through street protests and ensure that police are equipped, trained and instructed to police them lawfully.”

Amnesty International is calling on governments and suppliers of riot control equipment to impose an immediate export or transfer ban on Turkey: In particular tear gas and pepper sprays; plastic bullets and other kinetic impact projectiles.

Such a ban should remain in force until the Turkish authorities allow prompt, independent and impartial investigations into the allegations of abusive or arbitrary use of force, and demonstrate a commitment to their use in accordance with international standards.

### **Background Information**

**Widespread and systematic abusive force** was used by law enforcement officials in violation of international human rights standards.

According to the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, police dispersing assemblies must avoid the use of force or, where that is not practicable, restrict such force to the minimum extent necessary.

*Live ammunition* - On 1 June **Ethem Sarisülük** was shot in the head by a police officer and died as a result of his injuries on 14 June. A police officer has been indicted, but on the least serious charges possible - causing death by exceeding the limits of legitimate defence without intent. Ethem Sarisülük's family and potential witnesses are being harassed.

*Water cannons* were used repeatedly and unnecessarily against peaceful demonstrators including those fleeing police or hiding inside buildings. There is strong evidence that chemical irritants had been added to the water which caused burning sensation and reddening of the skin.

*Tear gas canisters* were fired as a weapon against protestors. Tear gas was also used against people fleeing police and bystanders as well as at people in residential buildings and commercial premises and health facilities. Police officers sprayed *pepper spray* in the eyes of demonstrators as a punishment after they were apprehended..

Witnesses report that **Abdullah Cömert** was hit in the head by a tear gas canister fired at close range by a police officer in Antakya on 3 June and died of his injuries on the following day.

*Plastic bullets* were fired at close range to head and upper parts of the body.

On 11 June **Hülya Arslan** lost her right eye and had her nose broken after police fired plastic bullets in Gezi Park.

*Sexual assault*

**Eylem Karadağ** was detained, beaten and groped by male police officers after she was apprehended, close to the scene of a demonstration in the Ankara district of Dikmen on 26 June. She made a complaint about the sexual assault and was informed that her case will be investigated.

**Deniz Erşahin** was sexually assaulted by police officers in the Kızılay district of Ankara on 16 June. Her complaint was registered by police.

### *Beatings*

Scores of cases of ill-treatment were reported to Amnesty International in Ankara, Antakya, Istanbul and Izmir that had occurred during dispersal of demonstrations, on detention by police officers, during unofficial detention and during transfer to police custody.

On 2 June **Ali Ismail Korkmaz**, a protestor in the central Anatolian city of Eskişehir was severely beaten and died as a result of the injuries he sustained on 10 July. CCTV evidence of the beating was destroyed but despite this four police officers and four civilians are due to stand trial accused of causing his death.

**Hakan Yaman**, a 37 year-old father of two was beaten by police near his home in the Sarıgazi district of Istanbul on 3 June while a demonstration was taking place on the nearby Demokrasi Avenue. His nose, cheek bone, and the bones of his forehead and his chin were broken. He lost one eye completely and has lost 80 percent of his sight in the other eye. His skull was fractured from the top of his head all the way down to his jaw and his back sustained second degree burns from being thrown on a fire. He lost consciousness during the attack. Hakan Yaman filed a criminal complaint on grounds of attempted murder.

**Kemal Soğukdere** and **Alper Çakıcı**, both journalists working for Al Jazeera, were beaten on the evening of 17 June while walking in Taksim, Istanbul, in spite of informing the police that they were media. Police left them after taking the memory card from their camera. They filed a criminal complaint with the prosecutor's office in Istanbul but have not heard back.

### *Unofficial detention*

Under international law and standards, anyone deprived of their liberty should have prompt access to family and counsel and should be held only in an official place of detention.

However, unofficial detention has been used as a means for intimidation and violence. **Deniz Kaptan** was apprehended by plain clothes police close to Gezi Park in the evening of 15 June. Police officers swore at him and confiscated his national ID card before releasing him one and half hours later.

**Gökhan Biçici**, a journalist reporting for Turkey's IMC TV was detained on the street and in police buses for more than six hours before being taken into official custody on 16 June. Video evidence shows him being beaten by a group of riot police officers on a street in the Şişli district of Istanbul.