

PUBLIC APPEAL

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Turkey

Conscientious objector subjected to ill-treatment and death threats from fellow inmates

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of conscientious objector Mehmet Tarhan who has been subjected to death threats and beatings by other prisoners since his imprisonment on 11 April and the delay in ensuring his safety by the prison authorities after the abuses were reported.

Mehmet Tarhan was detained in Izmir on 8 April 2005 and then imprisoned in the military prison in Sivas on 11 April where he has remained since then. He has been subjected to severe beatings and death threats by other prisoners since his imprisonment there. When Mehmet Tarhan informed prison authorities of the abuse no immediate action was taken to ensure his safety and the abuse reportedly continued. After his lawyer learned about the abuse, she raised her concerns for his safety with the prison administration and an investigation into the alleged abuse was opened and some action was then taken by the prison authorities to protect him.

On 27 October 2001, Mehmet Tarhan had publicly declared his conscientious objection to compulsory military service at a press conference in Ankara. He stated:

“I condemn every kind of violence believe that joining or condoning violence will only result in new violence and everyone will be responsible for the consequences. I think that wars caused by power-mongering states are first and foremost a violation of the right to life. The violation of the right to life is a crime against humanity and no international convention or law can justify this crime, regardless of any rationale. I therefore declare that I won’t be an agent of such crime under any circumstances. I will not serve any military apparatus.” Since then he remained active in his anti-militarist activities. On 27 October 2004 he again publicly declared his conscientious objection.

A case was opened against Mehmet Tarhan and he is being charged with "insubordination", according to Article 88 of the Turkish Military Penal Code (TACK). This charge carries a penalty of between three months' and five years' imprisonment. The last hearing took place on 26 May and observers noted that there were signs of bruising on Mehmet Tarhan's body and that he was unable to walk properly. The next hearing has been adjourned until 9 June. Amnesty International considers Mehmet Tarhan to be a prisoner of conscience, prosecuted for his conscientiously-held beliefs, and calls for his immediate release. The organization also urges the Turkish authorities to introduce an alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors which is not discriminatory or punitive.



Mehmet Tarhan participating in a peace demonstration © private

Background information:

In Turkey it is compulsory for all men between the ages of 19 and 40 to do military service for 15 months. Amnesty International is concerned that the right to conscientious objection is not legally recognized by the authorities, and provisions do not exist for an alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors. International human rights standards recognize the right to conscientious objection. Recommendation No. R (87) 8 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States of the Council of Europe Regarding Conscientious Objection to Compulsory Military Service of 9 April 1987 states that, "Anyone liable to conscription for military service who, for compelling reasons of conscience, refuses to be involved in the use of arms, shall have the right to be released from the obligation to perform such service.... Such persons may be liable to perform alternative service." In recent years in Turkey there have been a small number of conscientious objectors who have publicly stated their refusal to carry out military service. They are usually subject to criminal prosecution.

Recommended action:

Please send politely worded letters to the Turkish authorities in English or your own language:

- Calling for a thorough, independent and impartial investigation into the death threats and abuse Mehmet Tarhan has suffered and for the perpetrators of the abuses to be brought to justice;
- Calling for an independent and impartial investigation into the reported failure of the prison authorities to immediately ensure Mehmet Tarhan's safety;
- Urging the Turkish authorities to ensure that Mehmet Tarhan receives an independent medical assessment and treatment for injuries sustained while in prison;
- Calling for the authorities to suspend all legal proceedings against Mehmet Tarhan;
- Urging the Turkish authorities to release Mehmet Tarhan immediately and unconditionally;
- Urging the Turkish government to establish an alternative civilian service, which is not of punitive length, for conscientious objectors.

Whom to write:

Prime Minister

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E-mail: rte@akparti.org.tr

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Minister of the Interior

Mr Abdulkadir Aksu
Ministry of Interior
İçişleri Bakanlığı
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Salutation: Dear Minister

State Minister with responsibility for Human Rights

Mr Abdullah Gül
Office of the Prime Minister
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Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister for Justice

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Salutation: Dear Minister

Send copies of your letters to the diplomatic representatives of Turkey accredited to your country.

