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£TURKEY: @Hüseyin Toraman - "Disappeared" in Istanbul

On 27 October 1991, Hüseyin Toraman, aged 25, was detained outside his home in the Kocamustafapa_a district of Istanbul by three officers of the political branch of Istanbul police who were armed and in plainclothes. There are several witnesses to the detention and claims that he was subsequently seen in police custody. However, three months after the detention the relevant police authorities still deny holding him and deny any knowledge of his present whereabouts despite desperate pleas for information from his family and wide publicity about his case in the press.

According to press reports and statements by relatives and witnesses, this is what happened: On the morning of 27 October, Hüseyin Toraman had gone to the grocer's shop when his wife heard shouting outside. Believing that he had suffered an asthma attack, she rushed to the window and saw him being hit by three armed men in civilian clothes and pushed into a white Renault with the licence number 34-ATZ-56. A neighbour who feared that Hüseyin Toraman was being abducted phoned the Kocamustafapa_a Ç_nar Police Station. The officers on duty checked the licence number. When they found that it belonged to a vehicle of the political branch, they decided not to interfere.

A journalist later visited this police station, together with Hüseyin Toraman's parents, and a tape was made of the conversation with the local police chief, Sebahattin U_urlular:

"It was a Sunday. I was not working, but according to what I learned later on, those who took Hüseyin Toraman were political police. Our team found this out and so they did not do anything. They took your son as he was going to the grocery store, and a neighbour took the registration number and started shouting "They are kidnapping someone". They were three armed people. Then a neighbour phoned this police station and the registration number was given out on the police radio. People from our team looked at the number, saw it was a political branch car and so did not do anything".

It appears that Hüseyin Toraman, who was reportedly active on behalf of a political organization illegal under Turkish law, had been wanted by the police, since April 1991 at least, when a police officer was killed and another wounded during an incident at Hüseyin Toraman's previous home. In Hüseyin Toraman's absence, a police team from the nearby town of Gebze had come to his house and was lying in wait when a police team from Istanbul arrived to investigate and apparently opened fire without warning, killing one police officer and wounding another. Since that day, Hüseyin Toraman had lived under a false name, _smaıl Çelik, fearing for his life.

In an interview published in the weekly Tempo of 1-7 December 1991, Ali R_za Toraman, Hüseyin's father, described the incident:

"Somebody who had been detained while distributing leaflets in Gebze gave Hüseyin Toraman's name. The Gebze police were looking for my son after that. Hüseyin was living in the Maltepe district of Kartal at that time. The Gebze police found out his address and on 27 April [1991] they lay in wait in the house. The Istanbul police heard over their radios that an operation was going on there - and they went to the house. But the two teams of [plainclothes] police did not realize that the others were police also and they started firing at each other thinking that it was Hüseyin, or terrorists. And in the shooting a chief superintendent was killed and an officer wounded. Of course, Hüseyin was nowhere around, but ever since that time they were after Hüseyin in order to get vengeance for their colleague who had been killed. They put a seal on the door of the house and left a note saying `A policeman was killed in this house. We will avenge him.' Then they detained me. They tortured me in various ways and asked questions. Some other family members were also detained. The police interrogators told me `Don't worry, we will find Hüseyin, but we'll bring him back to you in a coffin'."

Since his detention on 27 October, the parents of Hüseyin Toraman, who suffers from asthma and a slipped disc, have submitted petitions and questions to the relevant police authorities, government ministers, members of parliament and other authorities in order to learn their son's fate. Although everybody promised to help, these inquiries have produced no results. A person whose identity is known to Amnesty International but is being withheld for his protection, claimed that he telephoned Gebze Police Headquarters posing as a police officer and asked whether Hüseyin Toraman was still there. The police officer in Gebze with whom he spoke confirmed that Hüseyin Toraman was there and said that he was still under interrogation. Others have claimed that he was held at the political branch of Istanbul Police Headquarters under the name of _smaıl Çelik and had photographs and fingerprints taken there; that he was taken to Gebze for some time; but that all relevant records have disappeared meanwhile. He was allegedly last seen alive at Istanbul Police Headquarters around mid-November. When the Istanbul deputy Ercan Karaka_ asked the Istanbul Chief of Police, Mehmet A_ar, about Hüseyin Toraman's fate, he received the answer: "M_T [the secret service] may have taken him".

Three members of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commission - Halil _brahim Çelik, Mehmet Özkan and Ökke_ endiller - have since been appointed by the Commission to investigate the "disappearance" of Hüseyin Toraman.

Amnesty International is appealing to the Turkish authorities for information regarding Hüseyin Toraman's whereabouts and clarification of the circumstances surrounding his "disappearance".

