

Turkey: Activists against rape in custody on trial

Two years ago two young women N.C.S, a minor, and Fatma Deniz Polatta, were sexually tortured in a police station in Turkey.

The trial of the police officers charged with their torture progresses slowly. However, on the 21 of March in Istanbul, the trial begins of 14 women and two men, among them the father of one of the torture victims, their lawyer and other victims of rape in custody. They are charged with having insulted the security forces with their denunciation of custodial rape at a conference in June 2000.

Nazli Top, one of the defendants, stated AI was arrested in 1992. They brought me to the back room of a police station. They started to beat me. They applied electro shocks to my toes and fingers. They raped me with a truncheon. Sometimes they stripped me naked and poured cold water over me@.

0 Amnesty international has called on the Turkish authorities to drop the charges against these women's rights activists who are guilty only of peacefully expressing their views.

A representative of Amnesty International will observe the trial.

#### Background

N.C.S., a 16-year-old Kurdish girl, and her 19-year-old friend, Fatma Deniz Polatta, were allegedly tortured and forced to give false confessions while detained at Police Headquarters in Iskenderun in March 1999. They were held in custody for seven and five days respectively. According to their testimonies, their torture included rape and other sexual assault. Both were kept blindfolded during their detention. For the first two days, N.C.S. was forced to stand continuously, prevented from sleeping and using the toilet, and denied food and drink except sour milk. She was forced to strip and remain naked in a cold room. During the interrogation she was beaten - with blows directed especially at her head, genitals, buttocks and breasts - and forced to sit on a wet floor for long periods before being made to roll naked in water. On other occasions she was suspended from the arms and hosed with pressurized cold water. Police threatened to kill her and rape her mother. Fatma alleged the same treatment, as well as anal rape with a serrated instrument. While in police custody the two were also forcibly subjected to so-called a virginity tests which AI believes is a form of gender-based violence that constitutes torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

In November 1999 the two girls were sentenced to long prison terms after being found guilty of being members of the armed opposition group Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and taking part in violent demonstrations against the arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. The court did not wait for the results of the investigation into the torture allegations.

Between mid-1997 and November 2000, 132 women sought the help of a legal aid project in Istanbul for women raped and sexually abused in custody. Ninety-seven of the women are Kurds, four are Roma, one is Bulgarian and one is German. The alleged perpetrators are mainly police officers (98 cases), but also include gendarmes, soldiers and village guards, and in one case, prison guards. They are rarely brought to justice. AI has documented a general climate of impunity for those suspected of torture and ill-treatment in Turkey (Turkey- The duty to supervise, investigate, prosecute, April 1999, AI Index: EUR/44/24/99). Even where complaints of serious human rights violations are pursued by the authorities and security officers are prosecuted, only a negligible proportion of them are eventually convicted. According to recent official figures, investigations of 577 security

officials accused of torture between 1995 and 1999 resulted in only 10 convictions (1.7 %). In the same period, 2851 investigations into cases of ill-treatment ended with 84 convictions (2.9 %). In cases where a conviction occurs, security officials often receive the lightest possible sentences.

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