

PUBLIC

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UA 88/02 Risk of torture and ill-treatment/  
police brutality

22 March 2002

**TURKEY311 Kurds detained in Istanbul and Mersin**

**killed: Mehmet \_en (m), aged 34  
Ömer Ayd\_n (m), aged 39**

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Police have beaten and arrested dozens of people in Turkey as protestors attempted to celebrate *Newroz*, the Kurdish New Year, on 21 March. In Istanbul and in Mersin on the Eastern Mediterranean coast, 81 and 230 people respectively, are in police custody. They may be at risk of torture or ill-treatment. Two protestors are reported to have died during the demonstrations in Mersin.

In Mersin, demonstrators attempted to participate in celebrations that had been banned by the local Governor. They were forcibly dispersed by police officers who used tanks, water cannons, tear gas and plastic bullets against them. Some of the demonstrators reportedly fought back with sticks and rocks. In the resulting clashes, Mehmet \_en died after a tank reportedly crushed him against a wall, and Ömer Ayd\_n died as a result of reportedly being crushed by the crowd. More than 100 demonstrators and 41 police officers were reportedly injured. Two police officers are reported to have died after the tank that they were driving crashed in an apparently unrelated incident earlier in the day.

In and around the district of Topkap\_ in Istanbul, 546 individuals were detained as they tried to gather in a public square to celebrate *Newroz*. Police officers reportedly also used water cannons, tear gas and plastic bullets to disperse the crowds. Some people apparently responded by throwing rocks at the police officers. Most of the detainees have been released from Istanbul Police Headquarters, though 81 people reportedly remain in custody. Twenty four of those released have since lodged a complaint with the Human Rights Association (IHD) stating that they were beaten by police officers.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

*Newroz* (Kurdish)/ *Nevruz* (Turkish) is a pagan festival of Zoroastrian origin which marks the awakening of nature at the March 21 equinox. It is also celebrated in Iran and by other Muslim communities in the Caucasus and Central Asia. At least 70 individuals were killed by security forces on *Newroz* in 1992 following violent demonstrations in the south east of Turkey.

Torture appears to be used routinely in police and gendarmerie stations, to extract confessions, elicit information about illegal organizations, intimidate detainees into becoming police informers or as unofficial punishment for presumed support of illegal organizations. Torture methods in Turkey documented by Amnesty International include severe beatings, being stripped naked and blindfolded, hosing with pressurized ice-cold water, suspending by the arms or wrists bound behind the victim's back, electric shocks, beating the soles of the feet, death threats and sexual assault.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:**

- expressing deep concern that police may have used excessive force and ill-treated demonstrators in Istanbul and Mersin;

- urging the authorities to ensure that police do not use excessive force, torture or ill-treatment against demonstrators in the future;
- calling for an investigation into the deaths of Mehmet \_en and Ömer Ayd\_n;
- expressing concern for the safety of those detained and urging that they should not be tortured or ill-treated while in police custody;
- calling for detainees to be given immediate access to lawyers, their families and any medical attention they require and asking to be informed of any charges brought against them;
- reminding the Turkish government of its obligations under Article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights, to which Turkey is a state party, which states: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

**APPEALS TO:**Istanbul Chief of Police

Mr Hasan Özdemir

Istanbul Emniyet Müdürü

Istanbul Emniyet Müdürlü\_ü

Istanbul, Turkey

**Telegrams: Emniyet Müdürü, Istanbul, Turkey****Fax: + 90 212 534 8571****Salutation: Dear Chief of Police**Minister of the Interior

Mr Rü\_tü Kaz\_m Yücelen

Ministry of Interior

\_çi\_leri Bakanl\_\_\_\_

06644 Ankara, Turkey

**Telegrams: Interior Minister, Ankara, Turkey****Fax: + 90 312 418 17 95****Salutation: Dear Minister****COPIES TO:**State Minister with responsibility for Human Rights

Nejat Arseven

Office of the Prime Minister,

Ba\_bakanl\_k,

06573 Ankara, Turkey

**Fax: + 90 312 417 04 76****Salutation: Dear Minister**

and to diplomatic representatives of Turkey accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 3 May 2002.