

PUBLIC

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UA 205/03 Fear for safety/Threats

TURKEY Ridvan Kizgin (m), human rights defender

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Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of human rights defender Ridvan Kizgin, after he received a number of threatening telephone calls connected to his human rights work.

Ridvan Kizgin is the chairperson of the local branch of the *Insan Haklari Dernegi* (IHD), Human Rights Association in Bingöl, southeast Turkey. On 5 July, the branch released its report on the human rights situation in the province of Bingöl during the six-month period from January to June 2003, which highlighted an apparent increase in human rights violations including ill-treatment and harassment by police and gendarmerie units.

At 10pm on 8 July, Ridvan Kizgin reportedly received a telephone call at his home from a man identifying himself as the commander of the gendarmerie regiment in Bingöl province, who told Ridvan Kizgin to come to the local gendarmerie headquarters. The man reportedly said that Ridvan Kizgin's statements on human rights violations were incorrect and that he should only make statements after he had talked to the gendarmerie. Ridvan Kizgin told the caller that the IHD issues its reports on the basis of statements received from the victims of human rights violations. The caller, who seemed to be drunk, then reportedly began to threaten him.

Ridvan Kizgin received a telephone call at home at 10.45pm on the same evening, and also on his mobile phone at 9.30am on 10 July. Both calls were from another individual who reportedly told him that the gendarmerie commander wanted to see him. The caller told Ridvan Kizgin to retract the IHD report on human rights violations in Bingöl and make a statement that the allegations were not correct. Another telephone call was received at his home at 4.30pm on 10 July, but Ridvan Kizgin was not there.

The telephone calls appear to constitute a deliberate attempt to restrict the legitimate work of a human rights defender. Members of the IHD have been subjected to physical harassment, death threats, arbitrary detention, and trials for their work promoting human rights. The Bingöl branch and its chairperson Ridvan Kizgin have been under placed under great pressure by Turkish authorities for several years. A total of 47 cases have been opened against Ridvan Kizgin on the grounds of his activities as a human rights defender.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

On 26 January 2002, Ridvan Kizgin and Feyzi Akbulut, the secretary of the Bingöl branch of the IHD, were imprisoned following their attendance as observers at a press conference in commemoration of the first anniversary of the "disappearances" of Serdar Tanis and Ebubekir Deniz. After a UA was issued on their behalf (UA 57/02, EUR 44/014/2002, 21 February 2002 and follow-ups), they were finally released on 18 March 2002. At the time, Ridvan Kizgin thanked Amnesty International for its concern and support, saying "we want you to know that this solidarity and support gives strength to the IHD Bingöl branch". On 2 April 2003, Ridvan Kizgin was detained again by police officers but released on the same day after giving a statement to the prosecutor.

This pressure on the branch in Bingöl and the general incidence of human rights violations reported by the local population of Bingöl is alleged to have risen during recent months. An earthquake struck the city on 1 May 2003, and population - many of whom are currently living in tents - are facing great hardship.

Founded in 1986, the IHD is Turkey's largest human rights organization, and has played an important role in monitoring human rights violations and making them known to the public in Turkey. At least ten IHD

members have been killed since 1991. In May 1998, the then IHD president Akin Birdal was shot and critically injured at the IHD headquarters. Amnesty International believes the Turkish authorities created the climate for this assassination by trying to link them to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Several IHD branches have also been closed on various pretexts.

Over the past eighteen months, Turkey has introduced laws with the stated aim of restricting human rights violations perpetrated by security officials. However, there has been a huge rise in the number of cases being opened against the IHD and other human rights organizations and defenders. These cases are usually opened under Law No 2908 on Associations, Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law, or Law No 2911 on Meetings and Demonstrations. In the last two years there have reportedly been 437 cases opened against the IHD; in the previous 14 years a total of 300 cases had been opened. While such trials usually end in acquittal or a sentence which is suspended or commuted to a fine, Amnesty International considers that they constitute a form of judicial harassment designed to intimidate human rights defenders and restrict their activities.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Ridvan Kizgin, who has been intimidated, detained and threatened, reportedly as a result of his human rights work;
- urging that immediate measures are taken to ensure his safety, in accordance with his own wishes;
- pressing the authorities to carry out an immediate, impartial and exhaustive investigation into the intimidation against him, to make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- requesting that the authorities take steps to extend durable protection in law to the IHD and its staff and to allow human rights defenders to pursue unhindered their lawful role of monitoring and reporting human rights matters, in line with the UN Declaration on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders;
- calling on the authorities to take effective action to ensure all public servants recognize the legitimacy of the work of human rights defenders.

**APPEALS TO:**

Minister of Justice

Mr Cemil Çiçek

Ministry of Justice

Adalet Bakanligi

06659 Ankara, Turkey

**Telegram: Justice Minister, Ankara, Turkey**

**Fax: + 90 312 418 5667**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Minister of the Interior

Mr Abdulkadir Aksu

Ministry of Interior

İçişleri Bakanligi

06644 Ankara, Turkey

**Telegram: Interior Minister, Ankara, Turkey**

**Fax: + 90 312 418 17 95**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

Deputy Prime Minister and State Minister with responsibility for Human Rights

Mr Abdullah Gül,

Office of the Prime Minister,

Başbakanlık,

06573 Ankara, Turkey

**Fax: +90 312 417 0476**

**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 21 August 2003.