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Turkey: Historic torture verdict confirmed by Appeal Court

On 11 November, Turkey's Supreme Court of Appeals upheld the convictions of 11 public officials following the death in custody of Engin Çeber in 2008. A prison director and two prison guards received life sentences for causing Engin Çeber's death through torture, the first time that such a conviction has been handed down in Turkey where impunity for torture has been the norm.

The re-trial by the local court was concluded in October 2012 after a previous verdict was thrown out on highly unusual grounds by the Supreme Court of Appeals. In addition to the three life sentences, a further nine public officials received sentences ranging from five months to 12 and a half years. The Supreme Court of Appeals upheld all but one of these convictions, and called for greater penalties for two convicted persons. Amnesty International has campaigned for justice for Engin Çeber since his death in 2008 and welcomes the verdict. It shows that the judiciary in Turkey can be effective in combating the impunity for torture enjoyed by state officials.

Speaking to Amnesty International, Engin Çeber's sister Serife Çeber said: "Whilst we recognize this decision as very important and welcome it, we have not been able to rejoice: at the end of the day, my brother was killed as a result of torture at the age of 29 and nothing will bring him back. But we cannot even imagine how we would have felt had the Supreme Court of Appeals overturned their conviction. We are also grateful to everyone at Amnesty International who campaigned for this outcome."

Amnesty International notes however, that successful prosecutions for torture and other ill-treatment remain extremely rare in Turkey. The Turkish authorities must ensure that the recent abusive force by police during the Gezi Park protests which resulted in at least three deaths and scores of injuries are brought to justice. Initial indications are not promising with characteristic delays, loss of evidence and obstructions by police hampering investigations.

The flawed investigations into Gezi Park protest related abuses underline the need for the Turkish authorities to establish a truly effective and independent police complaints mechanism.

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