

Turkey: Endemic torture must end immediately

The systematic and widespread nature of torture in Turkey puts nearly anyone at risk of being tortured, Amnesty International said today as it released its report *Turkey: An end to torture and impunity is overdue!*.

Amnesty International today concluded that the geographic spread of torture allegations, the range of potential victims and the number of testimonies the organization received, point to torture being systematic and widespread in Turkey. This, despite the European Union a year ago identifying the fight against torture as a priority for Turkey.

"Despite all declarations of intent issued by the Turkish government, we have not yet seen any signs of serious and effective measures to combat torture and the impunity that goes with it," Amnesty International stated.

Detainees in Turkey are routinely blindfolded during interrogations, and some throughout police detention, to prevent the identification of their torturers. Serious beatings, being stripped naked, sexual abuse, death and rape threats, other psychological torture and electric shocks, hanging by the arms, deprivation of sleep, food, drink and use of the toilet are common methods of torture and ill-treatment in Turkey.

The introduction of high-security prisons, so called F-type, has led to heightened concerns for the safety of prisoners. While torture mainly takes place in police custody, it is still prevalent in prisons and during transfers to and from prisons.

"Victims of torture include women and children, and are not restricted to those suspected of crimes under anti-terrorism legislation but also includes many people suspected of common crimes," Amnesty International said. "In some cases torture is linked to discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation or ethnicity."

Further doubt is cast on the Turkish authorities' declared disapproval of torture by the reported existence of sound-proofed interrogation rooms specially prepared and equipped for torture. Furthermore, human rights defenders have established the use of torture and ill-treatment techniques that do not normally leave marks when police officers expect a detainee to be released after police detention.

Incommunicado detention is a key factor contributing to torture and ill-treatment in Turkey: detainees are deprived of access to lawyers, family, friends and doctors. Legally, detainees may benefit from legal counsel at any stage and level of the investigation. However, people suspected of offences under the jurisdiction of State Security Courts can still be held incommunicado in police custody for up to four days.

Guidelines for prompt and proper registration of detainees and for notification of their families are often ignored. This is not only distressing for relatives, but creates conditions in which torture, "disappearance" or death in custody can occur.

Lawyers, human rights defenders and some prosecutors in Turkey all agree that torture persists because forced confessions play a major role in the investigation of crimes. Testimony is subsequently used as "evidence" in courts of law.

Many factors contribute to promoting a climate of impunity for torturers in Turkey. Victims and relatives are frequently terrified into silence, and when they do speak out, prosecutors are very reluctant to respond to complaints and evidence of ill-treatment and torture.

"The failure of Turkish officials to investigate allegations of torture not only allows torturers to go unpunished, but contributes to the unfair trial of the victim, and in some cases is the direct cause of miscarriages of justice," Amnesty International said.

Proper investigation and prosecution for torture is further hampered by measures taken by security officers to avoid proper medical reports, but more

worrying is a definite pattern of intimidation of health officials so they will not document cases of torture.

Unfortunately, there are also cases of doctors voluntarily concealing torture. In January 2001, 11 people were reportedly beaten and tortured following their arrest in the district of Sivasli, Usak, after an anonymous complaint that they had stolen sheep five years earlier. When they were taken to the state hospital -- blindfolded and with their hands chained -- the doctors did not examine them properly and did not note their complaints. A doctor reportedly responded "your head is split into two halves," when one of the detainees complained about his head bleeding.

"The Turkish authorities will have to take effective steps against torture in order to dispel the belief that they tolerate the persistence of this abhorrent practice," Amnesty International said.

The report urges the Turkish government to immediately implement a series of recommendations -- some of them very simple -- to prevent torture. These include:

ending incommunicado detention and ensuring that all detainees have immediate access to legal counsel.

outlawing blindfolding in police custody.

ending prolonged isolation in prison, including in F-type prisons.

all complaints and reports of torture or ill-treatment, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution are promptly and effectively investigated.

those responsible for human rights violations, including those who order them, should be brought to justice.

statements elicited under torture should not be invoked as evidence.

"The Turkish authorities should turn their words into action and send a loud and clear message from the highest level that torture is unacceptable and that perpetrators will be held accountable," Amnesty International demanded.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>