

## Public Statement

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### **Turkey: Amnesty International calls for investigation into Küçükarmutlu operation**

*Amnesty International is concerned that the deaths and injuries of yesterday's raid by Turkish police forces on the Istanbul neighbourhood of Küçükarmutlu might have been the result of excessive force used by the security forces.*

*On 5 November Turkish police forces conducted a raid on Küçükarmutlu, which has been the centre of hunger strikes against the new "F-Type" prison system. As a result of the operation four protesters -- Arzu Güler, Bülent Durgaç, Baris Kas and Sultan Yildiz -- died and at least 14 others were wounded. The four bodies were removed by police officers from a house which had been burnt down in the course of the raid. The house was one of two where hunger strikes continued; Arzu Güler was participating in the hunger strikes while the other three were supporters. Official sources state that the protesters set themselves on fire and died either from the resulting burns or from carbon monoxide poisoning. During the past few months the death fasters in Küçükarmutlu had repeatedly threatened to set themselves on fire should the security forces intervene.*

*The police operation reportedly started at 3 pm and lasted for 30 minutes: approximately 1,000 police officers forced their way into the neighbourhood with armoured vehicles, breaking down barricades constructed by the protesters. Ali Haydar Bozkurt, one of the hunger strikers, set himself on fire and was shot and wounded by police officers when he walked towards them from the barricades.*

Eyewitnesses, interviewed by a delegation of human rights defenders, reported that the police repeatedly fired their weapons both at specific targets and at random as they moved towards the death fast house. They also reported the use of gas bombs by the police. The eyewitnesses alleged that there was no armed resistance from the protesters and some newspapers have quoted witnesses saying that police fired into the house of the hunger strikers.

After the operation ended, a contested number of people were arrested and some wounded protesters were driven away in ambulances. Police have not confirmed the number of arrests, deaths or injuries. Furthermore, lawyers are reportedly not allowed to observe the ongoing autopsies.

Amnesty International is calling for a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into the deaths and injuries. In particular the organization is seeking information from the Turkish authorities on the justification for an armed operation of this scale at this particular moment and whether the security forces complied with the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. These Principles recommend that law enforcement officials “shall as far as possible apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force and firearms. ... Whenever the lawful use of force and firearms is unavoidable, law enforcement officials shall exercise restraint in such use and act in proportion to the seriousness of the offence and the legitimate objective to be achieved; minimize damage and injury, and respect and preserve human life; ...”

Amnesty International also calls upon the authorities to inform relatives about any detentions and to ensure that none of the detainees is tortured or ill-treated.

## Background

A hunger strike against the new prison system has been continuing inside and outside prisons for more than a year. The shanty town neighbourhood of Küçükarmutlu in Istanbul was the main place in which supporters of the political prisoners started a hunger strike and where a number of hunger striking prisoners continued their hunger strike having been released from prison on medical grounds. More than 40 people (prisoners, released prisoners and supporters) have already died during the hunger strike.

On 15 September 2001 police had intervened with teargas and water cannons in Küçükarmutlu in order to disperse supporters of the hunger strikes. On 5 November, the day of the second big intervention, the Turkish daily newspaper *Sabah* published pictures of the barricaded neighbourhood calling it an area “liberated” by the armed opposition group DHKP-C and criticizing the inactivity of the government.

Prisoners have usually been housed in large dormitories that hold 60 and sometimes more prisoners, but the Turkish authorities have started to build new wings to existing prisons and also 11 F-Type prisons in which dormitories are replaced by smaller cells. From the start of this process, there have been major protests and clashes in prisons. From October 2000, more than 1,000 political prisoners participated in a hunger strike in protest against the F-Type prisons.

On 19 December 2000 the security forces conducted an operation in 20 prisons during which 30 prisoners and two soldiers died. Hundreds of male political prisoners were transferred using excessive force to three F-Type prisons. As of July 2001, six F-Type prisons were already in use, and five more were being constructed. They have single and three-person cells with adjacent yards for three prisoners at the most.

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