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# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 06/95

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **ALGERIA** - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (targeted to Italian and Middle East Media), **TURKEY** (being sent to Turkey media plus trial observers by the Turkey Research Team).

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Sudan - 25 January - SEE NEWS SERVICES 275 AND 261

\*\* UN Commission on Human Rights - 31 January \*\* - There will be a release in Geneva of a report and news release on 5 target countries: Indonesia, Columbia, Kashmir, Turkey and Algeria, with a lead item on Kashmir (India).

Turkey - 8 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 261

Northern Iraq - 28 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 266

## TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

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ALGERIA: HUMAN RIGHTS SHOULD BE AT TOP OF ROME MEETING AGENDA

Amnesty International today urged the Algerian participants in a Rome meeting of Algerian political parties to ensure that human rights are at the top of the agenda in any discussion on the situation in Algeria.

In a similar meeting held in Rome last November, at least seven Algerian political parties participated, including the Front de Liberation National (FLN), the Front des Forces Socialistes (FFS) and the now banned Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), the President of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights, and other individuals. The Algerian authorities did not take part in that first meeting.

Amnesty International also calls on the FIS to take a clear and unequivocal position in condemning ALL deliberate and arbitrary killings, abductions, death threats and other attacks on civilians by armed Islamist groups in Algeria.

On several occasions, including during the first Rome meeting, FIS spokesmen have condemned "terrorist actions against innocent civilians, foreigners, and especially women, elderly people and children"; they also referred to the "universal principles of justice". Yet armed Islamist groups continue to attack and kill civilians, including journalists, teachers, civil servants and others believed to be opposed to the political program of the armed Islamist groups.

Whilst noting the FIS condemnation of the killings of innocent civilians, Amnesty International stated that claims that certain victims were "not innocent" are no justifications for deliberate and arbitrary killings by armed Islamist groups.

"It is unacceptable for these groups to decree that certain civilians shall be killed on the pretext that they are 'not innocent'," Amnesty International said.

Since the cancellation of the second round of elections and the imposition of a state of emergency in Algeria in February 1992, tens of thousands of people are reported to have been killed by security forces and by armed Islamist groups, and human rights violations and abuses by both sides have continued to increase.

Amnesty International has continued to condemn in the strongest terms the grave human rights violations, such as arbitrary detention, torture, unfair trials and extrajudicial executions, committed by the Algerian security forces.

The organization has repeatedly stated to the authorities that no level of violence or human rights abuses by armed groups can ever justify human rights violations committed by the security forces. The Algerian authorities have a duty and a responsibility to investigate such violations and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

On the other hand, the human rights violations committed by the security forces, no matter how serious, cannot be used as a justification for the killings and other attacks against civilians committed by the armed Islamist groups. The political leadership of these groups cannot justify these actions as being in any way legitimate, and must use their influence to bring such actions to an end.

The need to restore the respect for human rights for the Algerian civilian population must be the highest priority for all those concerned with the political situation in country.

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TURKEY: LEADING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS THREATENED WITH IMPRISONMENT

The Turkish Government threatens to cross a new threshold in its efforts to prevent monitoring of its human rights record, Amnesty International said today -- two days before five leading human rights defenders face prison sentences under the Anti-Terror Law.

Five human rights defenders face prison sentences on 11 January following two separate hearings at Ankara State Security Court. All are being tried under Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law. It provides for terms of imprisonment of up to five years for any statements deemed to be separatist propaganda "*regardless of the method, intention and ideas thereof*". Dozens of people have been imprisoned under this article for the expression of their non-violent opinions.

A member of the lawyers' group of Amnesty International's British Section will be attending all three trials as an observer.

Yavuz Önen, President of the Turkish Human Rights Foundation (TIHV) and Fevzi Argun, board member of the TIHV, are being prosecuted for alleged "separatist propaganda" in two sentences contained in its publication *Torture File 1980-1994*, a comprehensive survey of torture and deaths in custody since the military coup of September 1980.

Ak\_n Birdal, President of the Turkish Human Rights Association (HRA), Hüsnü Öndül, General Secretary of the HRA, and Sedat Aslanta\_, lawyer and former president of Diyarbak\_r HRA, are being tried for allegedly "separatist" statements. The statements appeared in a report issued by the HRA on the burning of villages by security forces and human rights violations in the southeastern provinces under emergency legislation, where a bitter 10-year-old conflict continues to be waged between government forces and the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK).

A verdict is expected on 12 January in a further prosecution against Ak\_n Birdal for a speech he made on Human Rights Day (10 December) 1992. Sedat Aslanta\_ is already serving two prison sentences for convictions under Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law which have not yet been confirmed by the Appeal Court.

Together with Sedat Aslanta\_ a total of six leading HRA officials, five of whom are lawyers, are already in prison. The lawyer Mahmut Akkurt was sentenced to 14 months' imprisonment for a speech he made two years ago at a public meeting as president of the Bal\_kesir branch of the HRA. Mahmut Akkurt was convicted under Article 312 of the Turkish Penal Code for "praising a crime" - though to Amnesty International's knowledge he made no advocacy of violence. Since 31 October 1994 he is serving his sentence in Kepsut prison, Bal\_kesir province.

The lawyers Mahmut \_akar, Nimetullah Gündüz, and Abdullah Ça\_er -- all officials of the Diyarbak\_r branch of the HRA -- were arrested on 16 December 1994 and are now in custody at Diyarbak\_r E-type Prison. Melike Alp (f), a Diyarbak\_r board member, was arrested on 30 December and is held in Diyarbak\_r Central Closed Prison. They were purportedly arrested for publishing in November 1994 a report on human rights violations which contained "separatist propaganda".

"The arrests reveal an official campaign to stifle all sources of information on human rights abuses in the provinces of southeast Turkey where a state of emergency has been in force since martial law was lifted in 1987," Amnesty International said today.

Scrutiny of the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation by outside agencies is becoming increasingly difficult. The Adana and Diyarbak\_r branches of the HRA are closed on the orders of the respective local governors.

At least 10 HRA members have been killed in southeast Turkey. Faced with constant harassment and death threats, HRA officials in the remaining branches in southeast Turkey are extremely limited in their ability to collect, record, hold and publish information about continuing human rights violations. There were dozens of "disappearances" and hundreds of political killings in the area in 1994. There is evidence linking security forces with some of the killings.

In October 1994 the Turkish Government banned entry for Amnesty International's researcher on Turkey. Visits by international delegations and the work of foreign journalists in the southeast are being hampered in many ways.

Amnesty International considers those HRA officials currently in prison to be prisoners of conscience, held in violation of Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which safeguards the right to freedom of expression. Turkey is a State Party to the Convention.

#### BACKGROUND TO ANTI-TERROR LAW

Amnesty International has repeatedly called for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience in Turkey, for a revision of the Turkish Penal Code, and in particular for an amendment of Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law (Law 3713) to ensure that in future no person is imprisoned for the expression of his or her non-violent beliefs.

Since 1991 the Turkish Government has been promising to change Article 8. However, it is not certain that the proposed changes would prevent the continued imprisonment of Turkish citizens for exercising their right of freedom of expression.

In October 1993 the parliamentary deputy for Istanbul, Ercan Karaka\_, vice-president of the Social Democrat Populist Party (SHP) group, together with 14 other parliamentary deputies, proposed a revision of the Anti-Terror Law. This amendment would have ruled out the prosecution or imprisonment of people for the expression of "separatist" views, provided that they did not advocate violence.

Amnesty International believes that the enactment of this proposal would be a major step forward to safeguard freedom of expression and human rights in Turkey.

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