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Turkey: Anti-terror arrests target prominent human rights lawyers

Overnight police raids in several Turkish cities have resulted in the arrest of 15 human rights lawyers known for defending individuals' right to freedom of speech and victims of police violence, Amnesty International said.

The police operation, which was reportedly aimed at clamping down on a banned left-wing group, included arrests in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir and targeted residential addresses as well as law offices. Headquarters and branches of the Contemporary Lawyers' Association (ÇHD) and the Peoples' Law Office in Istanbul were among the addresses included in the raids.

According to information received by Amnesty International, police searched the People's Law Office without having a prosecutor and bar association representative present, as required by law.

"The detention of prominent human rights lawyers and the apparent illegal search of their offices add to a pattern of prosecutions apparently cracking down on dissenting voices," said Andrew Gardner, Amnesty International's researcher on Turkey.

It is believed that the latest wave of arrests, which were carried out under Turkish anti-terrorism laws, targeted alleged members of the armed Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/ Front (DHKP/C). Because of a "secrecy decision" applied to the case, the authorities have not released any details to defence lawyers.

According to reports, more than 80 people have been detained as part of the police operation in seven cities across Turkey.

Amnesty International has long campaigned against the abuse of Turkey's overly broad and vague anti-terrorism laws to prosecute legitimate peaceful activities.

"Human rights lawyers have been just some of the victims in the widespread abuse of anti-terrorism laws in Turkey. The question to ask is: who will be left to defend the victims of alleged human rights violations?" said Gardner.

Lawyers – including some of those from the association targeted – previously told Amnesty International that they feared and had been threatened with arrest due to their work defending individuals in anti-terrorism cases.