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Turkey: Human Rights failures in Kobani protests

Police failed in their duty to protect lives and used excessive force causing further injuries during the violent protests that broke out across the south-east of Turkey in October 2014 following the Islamic State armed group's assault on Kobani. These human rights failings have been compounded by the lack of effective investigations into the deaths and injuries that occurred, said Amnesty International in a report published today.

[*Kobani protests in Turkey: Human rights failures*](#) is based on interviews with victims of the violence, their family members, lawyers, activists and representatives of municipalities and the Ministry of the Interior in the region. Research was carried out in Diyarbakır, Gaziantep and Siirt in October 2014 and in Cizre, Diyarbakır and Siirt in February 2015.

As up to 200,000 Syrian Kurdish refugees fled from Kobani into Turkey, demonstrators protested against the Islamic State (IS) armed group and those they claimed to be its supporters within Turkey and the Turkish government, who they alleged to be allowing the IS to advance. A week of protests and linked large-scale violence, left more than 40 people dead, including Kobani protestors, political opponents they accused of supporting IS, bystanders and three police officers. The clashes also brought scores of injuries and the destruction of public and private property across south-east of Turkey and beyond.

Police frequently failed to intervene adequately during the violent events to protect the life and health of both protestors and bystanders. In certain cases the police made no attempt to intervene in clashes between rival political groups in which protestors, counter protestors and bystanders were killed or injured. Police were also warned of specific situations of violence by protestors targeting individuals and property, but either failed or refused to attend the scene.

Arguments that police intervention in certain protests would escalate tensions are credible, but that does not excuse or explain why the police failed to act when called on to protect individuals under attack or when violence reached a level that deaths or injuries were inevitable.

There is a an urgent need for the policing operations to be investigated in terms of their ability to protect individuals, and for lessons to be learnt, planning undertaken and then applied in the event of further violent clashes occurring in the future.

Amnesty International received numerous reports of police officers using firearms in situations where there was no imminent threat to life or risk of serious injury, in order to disperse hostile crowds or to protect public property.

The circumstances that led to the use of firearms in many cases still remains unclear almost a year after the Kobani protests due to the authorities' failure to effectively investigate the cases of alleged abusive police use of force. In a number of cases documented in the report, there is strong evidence that police used excessive or unnecessary force.

Following the protests, in March 2015, Parliament passed provisions giving the police greater authority to use firearms, contradicting international human rights standards.

The response from the authorities since the protests has been equally bad, with provisions within the “domestic security package” granting police extra authority to use firearms likely to serve as an invitation to apply arbitrary and abusive force, increasing the likelihood of abuses still further.

Nineteen year-old **S.S.** and her father told Amnesty International that she was injured during the same clashes in the Beybahçe neighbourhood on 9 October. S.S. was hit at around 6.30pm in the evening after leaving her home in the neighbourhood to go to the scene of the protests. She was hit by four bullets in her chest and back and was paralysed from the waist down as a result. The family have received no news on the progress of the criminal investigation to find the perpetrator(s) responsible for inflicting her injuries but a prosecution under anti-terrorism laws, based on S.S.’s alleged participation in the protests was pending with the first hearing due to take place in September 2015.

In Cizre, twelve year-old **Nihat Kazanhan** was shot dead with a single bullet to the head on 14 January 2015. Initial statements from the authorities indicated that the police were not responsible for firing the shot. However, police cameras showing the shooting were later obtained by journalists and the videos broadcast on national television news channels. The footage clearly shows Nihat Kazanhan with other children on a small area of grass next to the neighbourhood where his family lived at the time of the shooting. The videos show the small group of children throwing stones while a tear gas canister lands close to where they were standing. As Nihat Kazanhan turns to run away, a shot is heard and he falls immediately to the ground before being carried off to a vehicle and then taken to the nearby Cizre state hospital. Five police officers are being prosecuted in relation to the killing. Amnesty International observed the court hearings in Cizre.

On 7 October in Diyarbakır’s Bağlar district, where many of the worst clashes in the city took place, six males were killed as a result of injuries sustained in clashes between rival groups close to the offices of Köy-Der, an association linked to Hûda Par. All of those killed were associated with Hûda Par. One child, **Yasin Börü** (16), and three young adults, **Ahmet Dakak** (19), **Riyad Güneş** (26) and **Hasan Gökğuz** (25) were killed after they entered a residential apartment to escape attackers. Autopsy reports indicate that they were stabbed and shot. Witnesses reported that bodies were thrown from the third floor apartment to the street below and that two of the bodies were burnt and one of those bodies was intentionally run over by a vehicle on the street below. Hûda Par officials told Amnesty International that numerous calls were made to the police during the 30 minutes that they were inside the apartment, warning them of the situation but that the police did not arrive until the bodies had been on the street for 45 minutes, an unreasonably long time to arrive at a central area of the city.

In Varto, Muş, **Hakan Buksur** was shot in the head at around 12.30 in the afternoon on 7 October 2014 at the scene of a Kobani demonstration and died of his injuries. His family’s lawyer told Amnesty International that Hakan Buksur took part in the demonstration but didn’t throw stones or engage in violence and that he was hit after exiting a building onto the street after the police had dispersed stone throwing protestors. His lawyer told Amnesty International that there had been no progress in the investigation and that, as of the end of May 2015, none of the six witnesses to the event that he had found had been called to give statements to the prosecutor. No police statements had yet been taken by the prosecutor before a secrecy ruling was applied to the case preventing details of the investigation being revealed to the lawyer.

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