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TURKEY: SIX DEATHS IN CUSTODY IN 10 DAYS - AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SENDS DELEGATION TO INVESTIGATE

Amnesty International today showed consternation about Turkey's appalling human rights record for the first 10 days of 1996: four political prisoners beaten to death in Istanbul, one journalist dead following detention in Istanbul, and a 14-year-old boy shot dead in police custody in Mersin.

On the night of 10 January, Gültekin Beyhan, one of six critically wounded prisoners from Ümraniye Special Type Prison in Istanbul, died of head injuries at Haydarpa_a Numune Hospital. This brings to four the number of political prisoners killed in the context of disturbances at Ümraniye Prison in Istanbul on 4 January 1996.

On 8 January, Çetin Karakoyun, aged 14 and detained on suspicion of theft in Mersin, died in custody at Ma_azalar Police Station, allegedly by an accidental shot to his head. Burial was carried out quickly by the police and the family was denied the opportunity to see the body. The boy's family allege torture as the cause of death. A police officer has been detained in connection with the killing.

On 8 January, Metin Göktepe, a Turkish journalist, was covering the funeral of two of the killed political prisoners when he was detained by the police. The following day, his body was "found" by the police, purportedly in a teagarden where the authorities claim he had collapsed after having been released.

Amnesty International is sending a delegation to Turkey to look into the circumstances surrounding the death of journalist Metin Göktepe.

"Investigative journalism is a dangerous profession in Turkey. Metin Göktepe is the latest journalist to die in circumstances that strongly suggest the involvement of the security forces," the human rights organization said.

(See below for further information on the above cases)

BACKGROUND

On 8 January Metin Göktepe (27) went to the cemetery in the Alibeyköy quarter of Istanbul to cover the funeral of two of the three political prisoners beaten to death in an Istanbul prison on 4 January (see News Service 01/96, AI Index: EUR 44/01/96 of 5 January 1996). Police cordoned off the area and carried out hurried burials without even allowing religious ceremonies to be performed.

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Hundreds of mourners, including relatives of the dead, were detained and taken to Eyüp Sports Centre and to local police stations.

Journalists who monitored the detentions and photographed mourners being kicked and beaten by the police were reportedly attacked by police officers who seized their films and video cassettes. Several journalists were detained, including Metin Göktepe. He was seen being beaten as he was taken away to Eyüp Sports Centre where he was held for some time.

Witnesses reported that they had talked to him in police custody. In the morning of 9 January, the prosecutor in Eyüp informed *Evrensel* newspaper that “police found Metin Göktepe dead in a teagarden in Eyüp where he had collapsed after having been released” and that his body was held at the Forensic Medicine Institute morgue. The prosecutor did not specify in which teagarden the body was supposed to have been found.

Metin Göktepe’s autopsy revealed that “the death of the person found with one broken rib and many traumatic lesions inflicted with a blunt object, resulted from subdural and subarachnoidal brain haemorrhage associated with trauma to the head from a blunt object and internal bleeding”.

Details of the autopsy reports on the three political prisoners killed in Ümraniye Prison on 4 January, which have emerged meanwhile, indicate: “internal bleeding in the brain, fractures and caving in of the skull due to blows to the head with a hard object”. Reportedly, their heads and faces had been smashed in such a manner that it was difficult to identify them.

In 1992, 10 journalists covering human rights in the southeast provinces were shot dead - many of them in circumstances strongly suggesting security force involvement.

In August 1995 the journalist Safyettin Tepe who worked for the Kurdish-owned newspaper *Yeni Politika* died in police custody in Bitlis. Police claimed that he committed suicide by hanging himself from the bars of the cell door by his underwear. The family was ordered to have the body buried quickly after having been refused access to the autopsy. A second independent autopsy which the family demanded was never carried out and the circumstances of Safyettin Tepe’s death remain suspicious. Safyettin Tepe was the cousin of Ferhat Tepe, correspondent in Bitlis of the Kurdish-owned newspaper *Özgür Gündem* who was abducted in July 1993, was seen by witnesses in police custody, and whose body bearing torture marks was found eight days later in a lake some 250 kilometres away. His murderers have never been brought to justice.

In 1992 the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture concluded that torture by police in Turkey was “widespread” and the following year the UN Committee against Torture used the term “systematic” to describe the problem. Both expert international government bodies recommended simple safeguards against torture, including access to legal counsel for all detainees and shortening of the maximum detention period. The Turkish Government failed to act on the recommendations, and as a result, the number of deaths in police custody as a result of torture continued to rise. The six are the latest victims of the Turkish Government’s intransigence on human rights reform.