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## PUBLIC STATEMENT

### TURKEY

#### *Trial undermines human rights defenders' work*

Amnesty International today condemned the resumption of a trial against 10 executives of the Diyarbakır branch of the Turkish Human Rights Association (HRA), describing the proceedings as

“a shameful attempt to sabotage the work of a courageous human rights organization.”

The 10 HRA executives are due to return to Diyarbakır State Security Court on 9 February, charged under Article 7(2) of the Anti-Terror Law with producing propaganda for the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK). If found guilty, they face up to 10 years' imprisonment. The prosecution is also calling for the permanent closure of the Diyarbakır branch of the HRA.

As no serious evidence has been produced to support the allegation that these HRA officers engaged in illegal or inappropriate activities, Amnesty International believes that they should not be standing trial.

The 10 human rights defenders are not accused of violent offences. Therefore, should they be imprisoned as a result of the current trial, Amnesty

International will adopt them as prisoners of conscience. Amnesty International members worldwide will campaign for their immediate and unconditional release.

Dr Heidi Wedel, a representative of Amnesty International's German section, will be in Diyarbakır to observe the proceedings, to convey Amnesty International's concern to the Turkish authorities and to demonstrate Amnesty International's solidarity with the defendants.

### **Background**

The HRA is Turkey's largest independent human rights organization, with offices throughout the country. It carries out its work against the backdrop of a bitter conflict between the state and the PKK in Turkey's southeastern provinces. As one of the key HRA offices in the southeast, Diyarbakır has had a prominent role in investigating and reporting on human rights abuses committed in the region.

The HRA has openly condemned human rights violations committed by both the state and the PKK, but its work is often presented by the government as undermining Turkey's reputation and damaging public confidence in the country's security forces. In such a highly-charged context, the HRA has been repeatedly targeted for attack. Its officials have been threatened, arrested, prosecuted, abducted and killed, and its offices have been ransacked and bombed.

In May 1998 the Turkish authorities began ordering the closure of branch after branch of the HRA in an apparent bid to stifle its activities permanently. The Diyarbakır branch -- as several others -- remains closed, and its archives were confiscated by the police.

The Turkish authorities have used a range of pretexts to justify these closures. The Diyarbakır branch was closed on the grounds that "its activities threaten the unity of the state". Other branches were closed because they were "acting outside their authority" or because "illegal publications" had been found during police searches.

*Alongside these closures, national and regional HRA officials face a string of prosecutions under repressive legislation which restricts peaceful freedom of expression. Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned the closures of HRA offices and the prosecution of HRA staff.*

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