

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

TURKEY

**Members of the Human Rights Association (IHD)
Those involved in cases investigated by IHD**

Police officers in the capital Ankara have raided both the national headquarters and the local branch of the Human Rights Association (IHD), Turkey's largest human rights organization. They confiscated a number of confidential files and computers, some of which contain information on human rights violations perpetrated by the security forces. Staff at the organization and victims of human rights violations being investigated by the IHD may now be at risk of harassment, arrest and torture.

The police officers arrived at the national headquarters of the IHD in Ankara at 9.10am on 6 May and searched the offices for about one and a half hours. They reportedly took away books, reports on human rights violations, files, cassettes, press releases and hand-written notes, as well as seven computers and computer discs. They also asked for access to the bank accounts of the IHD. After completing their search, the same group of police officers then went to the offices of the Ankara branch of the IHD, where they carried out a search and took away one computer and other written materials.

A warrant for the search of both offices had been issued on 29 April and a prosecutor from the Ankara State Security Court was reportedly present during the raids. However, police officers would not initially reveal the reason for the searches - when pressed, they reportedly gave the reason as "aiding and abetting an illegal organization" (Article 169 of the Turkish Penal Code).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The IHD is Turkey's largest human rights organization. At least ten IHD members have been killed since 1991. Members of the Turkish security forces have been implicated in some of the killings, but in most cases the killers have never been identified. In May 1998, the then IHD president Akin Birdal was shot and critically injured at the IHD headquarters. Amnesty International believes the Turkish authorities created the climate for this assassination by trying to link them to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Several IHD branches have also been closed on various pretexts.

In recent years, Turkey has introduced laws with the stated aim of restricting human rights violations perpetrated by security officials. However, there has been a huge rise in the number of cases being opened against the IHD and other human rights organizations and defenders. These cases are usually opened under Law No 2908 on Associations, Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law, or Law No 2911 on Meetings and Demonstrations. In the last two years there have reportedly been 437 cases opened against the IHD; in the previous 14 years a total of 300 cases had been opened. While such trials usually end in acquittal or a sentence which is suspended or commuted to a fine, Amnesty International considers that they constitute a form of judicial harassment designed to intimidate human rights defenders and restrict their activities.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing grave concern that police raided and took away files and computers from the national headquarters and the local branch of the Human Rights Association (IHD) in Ankara;
- urging the authorities to ensure that IHD staff and victims of human rights violations identified in these documents are protected from any reprisals, harassment, arrests or torture;

- asking them to ensure that human rights defenders are allowed to pursue their lawful role of monitoring and reporting on human rights matters as set out in the UN Human Rights Defenders Resolution;
- calling on the authorities to take effective action to ensure that the security forces and other public servants are aware that the work of human rights defenders is legitimate.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Mr Cemil Çiçek
Ministry of Justice
Adalet Bakanligi
06659 Ankara, Turkey

Telegram: Justice Minister, Ankara, Turkey

Fax: + 90 312 418 5667

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of the Interior

Mr Abdulkadir Aksu
Ministry of Interior
İçişleri Bakanligi
06644 Ankara, Turkey

Telegram: Interior Minister, Ankara, Turkey

Fax: + 90 312 418 17 95

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Deputy Prime Minister and State Minister with responsibility for Human Rights

Mr Abdullah Gül,
Office of the Prime Minister,
Başbakanlık,
06573 Ankara, Turkey

Fax: + 90 312 417 04 76

Salutation: Dear Minister

and to diplomatic representatives of Turkey accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 June 2003.