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EXTERNAL -- FOR RESPONSE ONLY

Turkey: Amnesty International's position on the arrest of Abdullah Ocalan

Responding to the considerable public attention given to the arrest of Abdullah Ocalan in Italy, and the Turkish authorities' stated intention to seek his extradition, Amnesty International restated its principles on such issues.

Amnesty International has reported and condemned the pattern of human rights abuses committed by PKK members since the 1980s -- in particular killings of civilians and prisoners. The organization strongly believes that, where there is evidence that a person has perpetrated human rights abuses, they should be brought to justice.

We would, however, oppose any person, irrespective of charges, being sent to a country where there is a serious risk that they would be judicially or extrajudicially executed, or where they risk torture or ill-treatment. Amnesty International would also require that alleged perpetrators should have a fair trial.

Amnesty International would oppose a move for extradition if the person would be subject to the death penalty. There is a motion in the Turkish Parliament to abolish the death penalty -- a step which Amnesty International has been urging throughout four decades and would welcome under any circumstances.

In Turkey there are long established patterns of torture and ill-treatment of political detainees, and serious unresolved issues of unfair trial. In the past Amnesty International has opposed the return of asylum-seekers who might face human rights violations. In this case, Amnesty International would urge the Italian authorities to secure from their Turkish counterparts the strongest possible guarantees of Abdullah Ocalan's physical safety and his right to a fair trial. To be credible, such guarantees would have to include the many procedural safeguards against ill-treatment and unfair trial which are demanded by international fair trail standards, but which detainees and prisoners in Turkey still do not have.

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