

EXTRA 135/99Fear for safety / Human rights activists
detained

28 September 1999

TURKEYLeman Yurtsever, board member, Human Rights Association (HRA), Istanbul
Musa K_l_ç, board member, HRA, Istanbul
_en Süer Kaya, board member, HRA, Istanbul
K_vanç Sert, HRA member
Nimet Tanr_kulu, HRA member
Zaide Honca, HRA member
Ümit Efe, HRA member
Zehra (Gül) Y_lmaz, HRA member
approximately 100 others

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of the Human Rights Association (HRA) members named above, and about 100 others, who were detained by police in Istanbul on 28 September 1999. According to eyewitness reports police hit people with truncheons and manhandled them, twisting their arms and dragging them along the ground. All may be at risk of torture or ill-treatment in detention.

They had gathered in Istanbul's Sultan Ahmet Square for a press release about disturbances at Ankara Central Closed Prison two days earlier which led to the deaths of at least 11 prisoners. Police reacted by sealing off the square for about three hours and detaining all those who arrived at the square.

Five lawyers, including Eren Keskin, President of the Istanbul branch of the HRA, were among those detained but later released.

It is understood that the detainees are being held in police custody at the Law and Order Branch of Police Headquarters in Istanbul.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 26 September 1999 11 prisoners lost their lives in a violent clash between prisoners and guards and soldiers in Ankara Central Closed Prison. In reaction to this incident, prisoners at prisons throughout Turkey took warders hostage and an extremely tense situation continues in these prisons.

The Human Rights Association is an independent organization founded in 1986 by a group of lawyers, publishers, artists and human rights activists to monitor abuses and protect human rights.

Since its foundation the HRA has been outspoken in its condemnation of human rights violations by government agencies and armed opposition groups. Its headquarters are in Ankara, but it has branches throughout Turkey.

From the start the HRA's courageous defence of human rights has led to considerable pressure from the authorities with its members imprisoned, tortured and sometimes even killed.

In 1998 the former President of the HRA, Ak_n Birdal, narrowly escaped an assassination attempt, only to be imprisoned by the authorities in May 1999 for the peaceful expression of his non-violent opinions. Amnesty International adopted him as a prisoner of conscience and campaigned for his unconditional release. He was eventually released on 25 September on medical grounds. His sentence was suspended for six months.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Leman Yurtsever, Musa K_l_ç, _en Süer Kaya, K_vanç Sert, Nimet Tanr_kulu, Zaide Honca, Ümit Efe, Zehra Y_lmaz and approximately 100 others detained by police on 28 September 1999 in Istanbul's Sultan Ahmet Square;
- asking for assurances that they will not be ill-treated in any way in detention;
- expressing concern at reports that police hit individuals with truncheons and manhandled them during the operation;
- asking to be informed about any charges brought against them.

APPEALS TO (please note that fax numbers can be difficult to get through to):

Istanbul Chief of Police

Istanbul Emniyet Müdürü

Istanbul Emniyet Müdürlü_ü

Vatan Caddesi, Istanbul, Turkey

Telegrams: Istanbul Emniyet Müdürü, Istanbul, Turkey

Salutation: Dear Chief of Police

Minister of the Interior

Mr Saadettin Tantan

İçiyleri Bakan_

İçiyleri Bakanl___, 06644 Ankara, Turkey

Telegrams: İçi_leri Bakan_, Ankara, Turkey

Faxes: + 90 312 418 9208

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Justice

Professor Hikmet Sami Türk

Adalet Bakan_,

Adalet Bakanl___,

06659 Ankara, Turkey

Telegrams: Adalet Bakan_, Ankara, Turkey

Faxes: + 90 312 418 5667

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

State Minister with responsibility for Human Rights

Mr Mehmet Ali İrtemişelik

Office of the Prime Minister

Ba_bakanl_k

06573 Ankara

Turkey

Faxes: + 90 312 417 0476

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 15 October 1999.