

TURKEY Supporters of prison hunger strike in Küçükarmutlu, Istanbul: Selma Kubat (f), Ahmet Pusat and others

Some 20 people were arrested in Istanbul on 15 September, as police used teargas and watercannons to disperse supporters of hunger-striking prisoners. They had gathered for the funeral of one of the hunger-strikers. They are at high risk of torture in custody.

Ümüs Sahingöz, who after a long hunger strike had been released from prison on medical grounds, was the 34th person to die in the hunger strike in protest against new high-security prisons, which began on 20 October 2000. She was one of a number of hunger-strikers who had been released from prison for health reasons and who continued the hunger strike with their supporters in houses in the Küçükarmutlu neighbourhood of Istanbul. The police had increased their presence in the area in the past few weeks, suggesting that they were planning to intervene.

Police reportedly dispersed the crowd using teargas and watercannons. Dozens of supporters of the hunger strike set up barricades and set fire to tyres. The police brought in armoured vehicles and dozens of troops and, according to supporters of the protesters, used truncheons and fired plastic bullets. The protesters threw stones and petrol bombs. Clashes continued for several hours.

Journalists who visited the area say at least 20 protesters were arrested; lawyers informed Amnesty International about 15 detainees, nine of whom are still held at the Anti-Terror branch of Istanbul Police Headquarters. Members of a German lawyers' delegation were arrested on their way to Küçükarmutlu, and their interpreters, Ahmet Pusat and Selma Kubat, are apparently among those still in custody.

Police reportedly took the body of Ümüs Sahingöz to the morgue of the Forensic Institute for investigation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

High-security "F-Type" prisons, where inmates are housed in cells rather than open dormitories, were introduced in December 2000. Many prisoners across Turkey went on hunger strike in protest. On 19 December the security forces intervened in 20 prisons to end the hunger strike by force: 30 prisoners and two soldiers died as a result of the operation. Hundreds of prisoners were transferred to the newly built F-Type prisons, where they have been held in isolation. The hunger strike has continued.

On 10 September a suicide bomber killed himself, two police officers and an Australian tourist in a square in Istanbul. Some 20 police officers and civilians were wounded. The leftist armed opposition group DHKP-C (Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front) claimed responsibility and declared the suicide bombing was a protest against, among other things, the prison operation in which many of their comrades lost their lives. Turkish authorities announced an "end to the government's tolerance towards illegal activities" in response.

Under Turkish law, people believed to be held on suspicion of offences that fall under the jurisdiction of the State Security Courts can be held in police custody without access to family, friends or legal counsel for up to four days.

They may then be held for a further three days, during which they have the right - often denied - to see a lawyer. With no access to the outside world, detainees are at the mercy of their interrogators. Torture is regularly used to extract confessions, to elicit information about illegal organizations, to intimidate detainees into becoming police informers, or as unofficial punishment for presumed support of illegal organizations. Torture methods include severe beatings, being stripped naked and blindfolded, hosing with pressurized ice-cold water, suspending by the arms or wrists bound behind the victim's back, electric shocks, beating the soles of the feet, death threats and sexual assault.

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

- urging the authorities to ensure that police officers do not torture or ill-treat the detainees;
- urging that the detainees are given immediate access to their lawyers, their families and any medical attention they require;
- reminding the authorities of their obligation under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which states: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

APPEALS TO:

Minister of the Interior

Mr Rü_tü Kaz_m Yücelen

Ministry of Interior

_çi_leri Bakanl____

06644 Ankara, Turkey

Telegrams: Interior Minister, Ankara, Turkey

Fax: + 90 312 418 17 95

Salutation: Dear Minister

Istanbul Police Headquarters

Istanbul Emniyet Müdürü

Istanbul Emniyet Müdürlü_ü

Istanbul, Turkey

Telegrams: Emniyet Müdürü, Istanbul, Turkey

Fax: +90 212 534 8571

Salutation: Dear Chief of Police

COPIES TO:

State Minister with responsibility for Human Rights

Nejat Arseven

Office of the Prime Minister,

Ba_bakanl_k,

06573 Ankara, Turkey

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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 15 October 2001.