

AI INDEX: EUR 44/165/96

EMBARGOED UNTIL 08.00 HRS GMT 26 OCTOBER 1996

TURKEY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND RELATIVES OF THE "DISAPPEARED"
FROM AROUND THE WORLD JOIN VIGIL IN ISTANBUL

Today, a delegation of 20 Amnesty International members, including relatives of "disappeared" in Argentina, Bosnia and Lebanon, will be joining the customary vigil held by the "Saturday Mothers" at Galatasaray in Istanbul.

"We are calling for a commission of investigation to find out what has happened to the men, women and children who have vanished since 1991 in Turkey," said Hatid_a Hren, Vice-President of "Women of Srebrenica" -- the organization for relatives of people who went "missing" after the fall of Srebrenica to Bosnian Serb forces in July 1995 -- as she prepared to join the vigil.

She was accompanied by Beba Had_ic, also from Srebrenica; Wedad Halwani, President of the Committee of Families of the Disappeared and Detained in Lebanon, an organization she helped establish after her husband, Adnan Halwani, "disappeared" in September 1982; and Mirta Acuña de Baravalles, from Argentina, one of the Mothers of the Plaza del Mayo in Buenos Aires, whose daughter "disappeared" in 1976. Saskia Noorman-Den Uyl, a member of parliament from the Netherlands, also participated in the delegation.

Simultaneous events are being held by Amnesty International in more than 20 countries around the world. The human rights organization will seek meetings between Turkish Government ministers and the relatives of "disappeared" in Turkey to urge the establishment of an expert commission to investigate the fate of more than 100 victims of "disappearance".

Investigation is not only a step towards ending the agony of families who want to know the truth, good or bad -- but also an effective way of combatting further "disappearances". The brave stand of the Saturday Mothers has had an impact on the number of "disappearances" which has significantly dropped since 1994 -- the year when the United Nations received more reported cases from Turkey than from any other country in the world.

But the pattern of "disappearance" persists -- in western Turkey as well as the conflict-torn southeast. On 1 April 1996 Talat Türko_lu "disappeared" after having arrived at his mother's house in Edirne. The previous day he had told his mother that he was afraid that he would "disappear" because he had been followed to Edirne from Istanbul by people he believed to be members of the security forces.

Amnesty International has received no reply to its letter to the Prime Minister of 30 September 1996 concerning Ahmet Bozkurt, Halit Ertu_, Süleyman Tekin, Orhan Kaya and Selahattin Kaya, five shepherds who "disappeared" following a clash between security forces and armed members of the PKK near the village of Otluca near Hakkari.

Amnesty International has also energetically campaigned for an end to killings of prisoners and civilians by the PKK, focusing in its campaign report *No Security without Human Rights* on the PKK's abominable record of attacking teachers. One case highlighted is that of Bekta_Avc_, principal of Yeniköy Middle School, near Bingöl, who has been missing since he was abducted by the PKK in October 1993. The PKK has failed to respond in any way to three years of repeated appeals from Amnesty International.

An important factor in the pattern of "disappearance" in Turkey has been the abuse by police and gendarmerie of detention procedures which are already wretchedly inadequate and far short of international standards. Turkish citizens are very commonly snatched from their homes or public places by plainclothes police or gendarmes or village guards without insignia. Arrest warrants are more or less unknown. Families are kept in ignorance and records, if they are kept at all, are not normally accessible to relatives or lawyers. The detainees are not permitted access to families, lawyers or independent medical advice. The system is an invitation to torture and "disappearance".

Amnesty International's campaign for human rights in Turkey, which was launched on 1 October, made reform of detention procedures its prime target – calling in particular for a shortening of the maximum term of police detention, currently 30 days. On 17 October, Foreign Minister Tansu Çiller made a public undertaking that the government would reduce the period of police detention to meet "international standards". She emphasized that this measure would apply to people arrested for offences tried in the State Security Courts – those most at risk of torture and "disappearance".

Amnesty International's view is that such a change, if enacted, could be a real turning point in human rights. Aware that there have been many unfulfilled promises of similar reform, Amnesty International has written to the Foreign Minister asking for a timetable for the changes, and urging that the planned reform be followed up by measures to provide prompt access to legal counsel, proper procedures for registration of detainees and notification of their families, and just as importantly, sanctions against police and gendarmerie officers who attempt to circumvent these safeguards.

ENDS\

For information, please call:

Carsten Jurgensen
+44 385 995 4289 (mobile)
+ 90 212 2529600 (Istanbul)

Jonathan Sugden
+44 171 4135715 (London)