

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 44/169/96

EXTRA 167/96

Fear of "disappearance" / Fear of torture 30 October 1996

TURKEY Ekber Geçgel
Selçuk Geçgel
Ali Geçgel
Irfan Aslan
Bedri Ka_kale
Kenan Demir, village headman (*muhtar*) of Tozkoparan
Süleyman Kaya
Nihat Kaya
plus some 17 other villagers (names unknown)

There has been no news of some 25 male villagers from Tozkoparan in Tunceli province since 23 October 1996 when they were detained in the village by Special Operations Team members (see below). Amnesty International fears the men may be facing torture in custody, and are at risk of "disappearance", as has happened on similar occasions in the past.

The detainees were reportedly beaten by the Special Operations Team members, who also raided the food shop of Selçuk Geçgel, taking all the food away, locking up the shop and taking the key with them. Selçuk Geçgel's wife, who has an eight-month-old baby and a daughter, aged two, has been left without any provisions. Destruction and confiscation of food supplies is designed to deny members of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) operating in the province the possibility of obtaining food, either given voluntarily or under duress, from the population. The official policy of a food embargo allows villagers only very scarce supplies and the possibility of buying food only on certain specified days.

It is not known where the detainees have been taken. Their women folk are said to be very frightened, some of them sleeping in the open for fear of further raids.

The village of Tozkoparan has not agreed to join the system of state-armed village guard militia (see below).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Government forces are fighting armed members of the PKK over some of the most rugged terrain in the country. PKK frequently visit villages to collect food and other supplies, which are given willingly or unwillingly. The village guard system is used as a method of holding down territory. Villagers are offered a salary in exchange for bearing arms against the PKK. When the system was established in the mid-1980s, village guards were supposed just to defend their own village. Now, village guards are deployed as a paramilitary force to participate in operations against other villages, carry out identification checks on roads, and other duties.

In theory, membership of the village guard corps is voluntary, but in practice villagers are caught between two fires. Many are reluctant to serve as village guards for fear of being killed by the PKK. However, those who refuse to join are subject to reprisals by the security forces, or village guards from neighbouring villages, who accuse them of actively or passively supporting the PKK.

Security operations in villages are usually carried out by gendarmes (soldiers carrying out police duties in rural areas), members of Special Operations Teams (heavily armed units trained for close combat and operating under the control of the Interior Ministry), or village guards, or all three acting together. Normally no judicial authority (such as a judge or prosecutor) is present. The inhabitants of the village are assembled in the village square, and those selected for interrogation are taken away to a police station, gendarmerie post or other place of detention, or are interrogated in the village itself. Unprotected by the most basic safeguards against torture, such villagers are frequently exposed to the most brutal treatment - sometimes resulting in severe injuries or even death.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Kenan Demir, the *muhtar* of Tozkoparan village in Tunceli province, and some 24 other villagers detained on 23 October 1996 and since held incommunicado at an undisclosed location;
- urging that their whereabouts be established without delay, their detention registered and their families informed promptly;
- urging that they be protected from any form of torture or ill-treatment;
- asking to be informed of any charges brought against them.

APPEALS TO:

1. Tunceli Chief Public Prosecutor:

Cumhuriyet Ba_savc_s_
Hükümet Kona__
Tunceli, Turkey

Telegrams: C. Bassavcısı, Tunceli, Turkey

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor

2. Tunceli Chief of Police:

Mr Süleyman Güleç
Tunceli Emniyet Müdürü
Emniyet Müdürlü_ü
Tunceli, Turkey

Telegrams: Emniyet Muduru, Tunceli, Turkey

Salutation: Dear Sir

3. Minister of Foreign Affairs

Mrs Tansu Çiller
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
D__i__leri Bakanl____
06100 Ankara, Turkey

Telegrams: Tansu Ciller, Foreign Ministry, Ankara, Turkey

Fax: +90 312 419 1547

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

State Minister with responsibility for Human Rights:

Mr Lütfü Esengül
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 30 November 1996.