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Turkey: Conscientious objector at risk of imprisonment

The Turkish authorities must recognize and guarantee the right to conscientious objection, Amnesty International said on the eve of a trial that may send a conscientious objector to prison.

"Every person has the right to refuse to perform military service on the grounds of conscience or profound personal conviction, without suffering any legal or physical penalty. Instead of criminalizing people for exercising their human rights, the Turkish authorities must make provisions for an alternative civilian service that is not discriminatory or of punitive length," Andrew Gardner, Amnesty International's researcher on Turkey said.

On 4 October 2007, Enver Aydemir will stand trial on charges of insubordination following his refusal to perform military service. He has been detained at Eskisehir military prison since 31 July 2007. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience. According to his father, Enver Aydemir submitted a petition to the authorities informing them that he would refuse to perform military service on the grounds of his religious conviction.

After his arrest, Enver Aydemir claims to have been physically ill-treated and forced to wear military uniform by a group of 10 soldiers. Despite the pressure exerted upon him, Enver Aydemir remains resolute that he will not serve in the armed forces. He is willing to perform a civilian alternative to military service.

"The Turkish authorities must investigate impartially, promptly and thoroughly Enver Aydemir's claims of ill-treatment by soldiers and bring those responsible to justice," Andrew Gardner said.

Amnesty International urges the Turkish authorities to stop immediately the prosecutions of conscientious objectors and to introduce an alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors in line with European and international standards and recommendations.

"By dropping the case against Enver Aydemir, the Turkish authorities will signal that they are ready to comply with international human rights standards."

"Persecution is not the solution to conscientious objection."

Background

In Turkey it is compulsory for all men between the ages of 19 and 40 to do military service for 15 months. Amnesty International is concerned that the right to conscientious objection is not legally recognized by the authorities, and provisions do not exist for an alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors. International human rights standards recognize the right to conscientious objection. Recommendation No. R (87) 8 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States of the Council of Europe Regarding Conscientious Objection to Compulsory Military Service of 9 April 1987 states that "Anyone liable to conscription for military service who, for compelling reasons of conscience, refuses to be involved in the use of arms, shall have the right to be released from the obligation to perform such service [...]. Such persons may be liable to perform alternative service." In recent years in Turkey there have been a small number of conscientious objectors who have publicly stated their refusal to carry out military service. They are usually subject to criminal prosecution and imprisonment.

Public Document

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