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Turkey: Governor threatens to deprive demonstrators and their families of health care

Reported plans by the governor of the southern Turkish province of Adana to cut health care from demonstrators and their families violate international standards, Amnesty International said today.

Demonstrations against the alleged ill-treatment of imprisoned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan have taken place across the southern and eastern provinces of Turkey since 17 October. There are continuing reports that the law enforcement response to the demonstrations, which were at times violent, has included excessive use of force and other forms of ill-treatment

"The authorities' response to the demonstrations must be consistent with their human rights obligations and not involve collective punishment," said Andrew Gardner, Amnesty International's expert on Turkey.

Amnesty International has learnt that the Adana provincial authorities have started legal proceedings to withdraw so-called "green cards" from families of children who participated in these demonstrations.

"Green cards" allow the poorest families access health care and treatment. Reports also indicate that the authorities are taking steps to prevent the families of such children to receive assistance from the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation. This body provides coal to help poor families heat their homes in winter, among other forms of assistance.

"The steps to deprive children suspected of involvement in the demonstrations and their families of health care and other benefits are a form of collective punishment and violate the right of all persons to health and to an adequate standard of living, without discrimination," Andrew Gardner said.

"Rather than violating human rights, the Turkish authorities should ensure that their responses to the demonstrations are consistent with their obligations to respect and protect the human rights of all persons within their territories."

Such a response could include ensuring that the policing of the demonstrations is carried out in a manner that is consistent with international standards, including the use of force and firearms. Any cases against individuals alleged to have been involved in criminal conduct should be pursued through the criminal justice system in proceedings that meet international standards of fairness, particularly those set out in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.