

URGENT ACTION

INVESTIGATE WHEREABOUTS OF TWO MISSING MEN

Gökhan Türkmen and Mustafa Yılmaz have been missing since 7 and 19 February 2019 respectively and are suspected to have been abducted and forcibly disappeared. The authorities have so far been denying that they are being held in official custody. On 29 July four men who had been missing since around the same time have resurfaced in detention at the Anti-Terrorism Branch of the Ankara Police Headquarters. The authorities must promptly investigate to determine the whereabouts of Gökhan Türkmen and Mustafa Yılmaz and urgently inform their families.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

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Dear Minister,

I am writing regarding the suspected enforced disappearance of **Gökhan Türkmen** on 7 February 2019 in Antalya and **Mustafa Yılmaz** on 19 February 2019 in Ankara. Their families have not heard from either man since then, despite all their efforts and appeals to the authorities. Concern about their wellbeing has increased following the news on 29 July that four other men who had been missing since around the same time had been registered as being in detention at the Anti-Terrorism Branch of the Ankara Police Headquarters.

The relatives of the two men have gathered compelling evidence to generate strong suspicion that they have been abducted.

I call on you to ensure that a prompt, independent and impartial investigation is carried out to determine Mustafa Yılmaz and Gökhan Türkmen's whereabouts and their wellbeing, as well as the circumstances of their disappearance in order to bring to justice any actors found to have been responsible.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mustafa Yılmaz is a physiotherapist who had been dismissed by executive decree in the aftermath of the 2016 attempted coup. He was remanded in prison in October 2018, prosecuted and convicted for 'membership of an armed terrorist organization' on 8 January 2019. After being released from prison pending his appeal, Mustafa Yılmaz returned to his work as a physiotherapist. On 19 February, he left his home in Ankara to go to work and was never seen again. His wife's efforts to establish his whereabouts have so far been in vain, despite extensive information including CCTV footage apparently showing unknown individuals hitting Mustafa Yılmaz, putting a white bag over his head and taking him away against his will possibly in a black VW Transporter.

Gökhan Türkmen is also a civil servant dismissed under state of emergency powers following the 2016 coup attempt. He used to work as an expert at the Institution for Agriculture and Support for Rural Development. In August 2016, armed police searched Gökhan Türkmen's home in the context of an investigation for 'establishing and leading an armed terrorist organization'. Gökhan Türkmen who was not at home at the time of the search did not hand himself in. At the time of his disappearance, he had been on the run for almost three years with only intermittent contact with his parents. He was last seen by his mother in Antalya Province, southern Turkey, on 7 February 2019 when he borrowed a scooter, stating he would be back. The next day, his father found the scooter parked in a nearby street and reported his son missing on 12 February.

The authorities announced on 29 July that four other men, Salim Zeybek, Yasin Ugan, Özgür Kaya and Erkan Irmak, who had also disappeared in February 2019 from Istanbul, Ankara and Edirne, were being held in the Anti-Terrorism Branch of the Ankara Police Headquarters. They have only been able to see their wives very briefly in the presence of police officers and have been unlawfully denied their right to consult with a lawyer. They are reported by their families to have lost weight, be very pale and nervous. They are reported not to have disclosed what had happened to them during the last almost six months in which they had disappeared. On 10 August 2019, following 12 days in police custody, the four men were remanded in prison on pre-trial detention; the reasons for their remand were unknown at the time of writing.

Turkey's past history is marred by hundreds of cases of enforced disappearances in the 1980s and 1990s. In recent years, these have been rare, although Human Rights Watch documented the cases of at least four men in 2017.

Victims of enforced disappearance are people who have gone missing after being arrested, detained, abducted or otherwise deprived of their liberty by state officials (or someone acting with state consent or acquiescence) who then deny having taken them, or refuse to say where they are. Sometimes disappearances may be committed by armed non-state actors, like armed opposition groups. It is always a crime under international law. Although Turkey is not a party to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, it is bound by the prohibition of committing enforced disappearance under customary international law and other human rights treaties of which it is party, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Turkish.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 5 November 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Mustafa Yılmaz (he, him) and Gökhan Türkmen (he, him).