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TURKEY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR HALT TO HELICOPTER TRANSFERS

Amnesty International is today calling for an immediate end to all sales or transfers of military helicopters to the Turkish Government, in the light of mounting evidence that such helicopters are used to commit human rights violations.

The human rights organization is alarmed about reports of Turkish troops and gendarmes (soldiers carrying out police duties) being ferried to remote areas in helicopters where they torture and kill civilians, or where helicopters are used in attacks on villages which refuse to join the system of village guards, a militia armed and paid by the government to fight the PKK.

France, Germany, Italy, Russia and the United States have, in the 1990s, sold military transport, surveillance and attack helicopters to Turkey. Helicopters are used in operations against the armed illegal Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) but also in operations against civilians in which grave human rights violations have been committed.

Currently, companies in France, Russia and the USA are bidding to supply further quantities of military helicopters to Turkey. Amnesty International believes that before any further military helicopters are transferred, the Turkish military authorities should demonstrate to impartial observers that they are not being used for human rights violations and that proper safeguards are established to prevent any recurrence (see below for cases in which helicopters were used for human rights violations).

The supplier countries must observe their international obligations, in particular the OSCE Principles Governing Conventional Arms Transfers which state that "each participating State will avoid transfers which would be likely to be used for the violation or suppression of human rights and fundamental freedoms". All countries supplying helicopters to Turkey are OSCE member states.

"Governments of supplier countries are co-responsible for the use of the arms that they are producing and selling. Financial benefits on one side of the chain do not justify contributing to unjustifiable and illegal killings on the other. These governments must ensure reliable monitoring of the end-use of their weapons," Amnesty International said.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE USE OF HELICOPTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

On 12 October 1995 the newspaper *Evrensel* (Universal) reported that Ali Ihsan Da_l_, captured by gendarmes at Kuruçay_r village in Diyarbak_r province, "disappeared" after being taken away for interrogation in a helicopter on or about 19 April 1995. On 11 May Amnesty International

wrote to the Turkish Interior Minister about the “disappearance”, urging an investigation into the whereabouts of Ali Ihsan Da_1_, but by January 1996 had received no reply.

On 9 October 1994, it was reported by villagers that Turkish security forces burned down 17 villages in the mountainous eastern province of Tunceli during a three-week offensive against armed PKK members. The *Reuter* news agency reported that US-made Sikorsky and Super Cobra helicopters flew over the city of Tunceli all morning, ferrying in troops and launching rocket attacks. During these operations Ali Karaca, a miller from the Kom district of the village of _bnimahmut was, according to his family, detained by soldiers and flown by helicopter first to the local gendarmerie post, and then to Tunceli for interrogation. His family found him in a coma in hospital where he died several days later as a result of head injuries apparently resulting from beating.

On 6 May 1994 a large contingent of soldiers burned the village of Deveboyu, near Kulp in Diyarbakir province. A villager reported: *"While the village was burned, four helicopters were circling above. Afterwards the soldiers warned us that we should quit the village within three days, and then they set off for Kulp. After the soldiers had gone we tried to get what remained of our partially burned furniture out of the smoking ruins, but very little was left."* The villagers obtained permission to stay in the ruins of their village and in tents until they could harvest their crops. Two weeks later three male villagers “disappeared” after being taken into custody at the ruined village by four soldiers.

On 24-26 March 1994 helicopters and jet aircraft bombed several villages in __rnak province killing 36 civilians, at least 17 of whom were children. Official statements claimed that the bombing was accidental, but local inhabitants said that they had been subjected to death threats from security forces days before the bombing for refusing to join the village guards. In June 1995 the US Government reported that the Turkish Government had denied the bombings, but US personnel confirmed that “the raids did take place and that some civilians were killed.”

On 20 October 1993, 11 villagers “disappeared” after being taken into custody by soldiers in the village of Alaca, near Kulp in Diyarbak_r. An eye-witness told Amnesty International: *"They were loaded into two helicopters and taken away. Virtually the whole village saw the men being loaded into the helicopters. The village is now empty. It was burned down."*

Other similar cases have been researched and reported by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other human rights organizations, but information about end-use of military equipment in the conflict zone is increasingly hard to obtain. While Amnesty International researchers have been deported and banned from Turkey, journalists in southeast Turkey have in the past been victims of extrajudicial executions and “disappearance”, and human rights monitors are frequently detained, tortured and threatened.

Helicopters have also been used in the course of human rights violations in western Turkey. On 13 and 15 March 1995, 22 protestors were shot dead and others were seriously injured by armed police shooting directly into crowds during violent disturbances in Istanbul. An Istanbul municipality worker who witnessed the subsequent protests and the police shootings said: *"There were helicopters up above, tanks in front, and the police behind. The helicopters gave directions from above, the tanks moved forward and the police opened fire."*

NOTES ON TURKEY'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

Turkey has a serious and apparently worsening human rights record. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary and Enforced Disappearances received more reports of “disappearance” from Turkey than from any other Member State in 1994. There were over 40 more “disappearances” in 1995, and 17 reported deaths in custody as a result of torture. The omens for 1996 are not promising: in the first 10 days of the year there were six deaths in custody: four prisoners were beaten to death in an Istanbul prison, a journalist was beaten to death after being detained by police from the funeral of two of those prisoners, and a 14-year-old boy was shot dead in police custody in Mersin.

In the southeast provinces a bitter conflict between government forces and armed members of the PKK has claimed at least 18,000 lives, including civilians, since hostilities began in 1984. Because villages which refuse to participate in the village guard system are suspected by the authorities of assisting the PKK, they are frequently the subject of raids, often with helicopter support, in which villagers become the victims of torture, death in custody, “disappearance” and extrajudicial execution. Villages which put up village guards, on the other hand, are subject to raids by the PKK who also commit human rights abuses. They also have killed hundreds of Kurdish villagers, including prisoners, women and children. Hundreds of thousands of Kurdish villagers have been displaced by the warring parties' scorched earth policy. ENDS\