

PUBLIC

AI Index: EUR 44/20/00

UAI 65/00

Fear of "Disappearance" or abduction

Fear for

TURKEY_afak Akbulut (f)

_afak Akbulut is believed to have been abducted by Gendarmerie officers on 24 November 1999, the day she was released from prison. While in prison she was reportedly pressured to turn state's witness.

_afak Akbulut had surrendered to the authorities in Tokat, eastern Turkey, some months previously, together with a man named Selahattin Günel. They were charged under Article 146/1 of the Turkish Penal Code, which punishes attempts to overthrow the constitutional order by force, and carries the death penalty. Both were held first in Tokat prison, where _afak Akbulut reportedly married Selahattin Günel in order to obtain rights to see him. Later she wished to repudiate the marriage.

On 24 November Ankara State Security Court ordered that _afak Akbulut be released while her trial continued. Her family went to Afyon Closed Prison to wait for her, but the prison administration did not give permission for her to leave. At 10.30pm a colonel arrived at the prison with a convoy. At 11.30 the family saw the colonel's vehicle leaving; they saw _afak Akbulut in the back of the vehicle behind, with soldiers pushing her head down to stop her looking out. The vehicle had "GENDARMERIE" written on it. They ran after the vehicle, which left at speed and went into a building with a sign reading "Gendarmerie Station". The family went to the gendarmerie station, but were told that she was not there.

Her family have not seen her since, although she has telephoned several times. She says she does not know where she is, and several times the conversations have clearly ended against her will. Her family are extremely concerned for her safety. They fear she has been abducted and may be killed.

The Minister of Justice reportedly gave a statement after _afak Akbulut's "disappearance", saying that Selahattin Günel was handed over to the military service branch of the army (military service is compulsory for young men in Turkey with certain exceptions) and _afak Akbulut was taken with him at her own request. In his statement, the Minister openly acknowledged that _afak Akbulut had not been released from prison, as the court had ordered, but that she had been taken in a military vehicle to the military service branch.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Under Turkey's "Repentance Law", former members of illegal armed organizations may turn state's witness in exchange for reduced prison sentences. They are popularly known as "confessors": some have reportedly gone on to work as undercover or irregular agents of the security forces. "Confessors" are also likely to face reprisals from members of their own organization who consider that they have been betrayed.

In Afyon Closed Prison _afak Akbulut was put under pressure to become a "confessor". She told her family that in August 1999 she had been summoned twice to the prison director's office, where men in military uniform and in plain clothes, from Tokat, had tried to coerce her into becoming a "confessor". They reportedly threatened, among other things, to abduct and murder her cousin, raid her home and "get rid of" her entire family unless she did so.

She was also threatened by Selahattin Günel. Selahattin Günel had become a "confessor" some months previously. He told _afak Akbulut that if she did not become a "confessor", his first task when he was released would be to kill her cousin and older sister and destroy her entire family. He also wrote threatening letters to her family from prison. These letters were stamped "seen" by the prison authorities. When her lawyer visited her in Afyon Closed Prison,

_afak Akbulut told her that she was being threatened by Selahattin Günel and that she was very afraid that he would harm her family. She told her lawyer that she did not want to take advantage of the Repentance Law.

By 16 August 1999, however, _afak Akbulut reportedly could no longer stand the pressure, and signed a petition to take advantage of the Repentance Law. Following this she informed her lawyer that she no longer wanted her to act for her.

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

- expressing concern for the safety and well-being of _afak Akbulut;
- urging the authorities to take all necessary steps to establish the whereabouts of _afak Akbulut and that her family be informed without delay of the results of this investigation.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Interior

Mr Saadetdin Tantan

_ci_Ieri Bakanl___

06644 Ankara, Turkey

Telegrams: Interior Minister, Ankara, Turkey

Faxes: + 90 312 418 17 95

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Justice

Prof Hikmet Sami Türk

Ministry of Justice

Adalət Bakanl___

06659 Ankara, Turkey

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Ankara, Turkey

Faxes: + 90 312 417 3954 / 418 5667

Salutation: Dear Minister

Chief of Staff of the Gendarmerie

General Rasim Bektir

Jandarma Kuvvetleri Komutanl___

Bakanl_klar

Ankara, Turkey

Telegrams: Jandarma Genel Komutani, Ankara, Turkey

Faxes: + 90 312 418 9208

Salutation: Dear Chief of Staff

Please send copies of your letters 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 April 2000.