

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 44/78/96

EXTRA 82/96

Fear of torture

30 May 1996

TURKEY A. Kadir Bilen, aged 80

Ömer Akbay, aged 75

A. Selim Da_ku_u, aged 65

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of the three elderly villagers named above who have been held incommunicado at an unknown location since their detention in Kuruçay_r village on 29 May 1996.

It is reported that on 28 May at 10pm a group of village guards from Suluba_village in the district of Silvan came to Kuruçay_r village to detain some people. Villagers who feared that they might "disappear" in detention or become victims of extrajudicial executions violently resisted, and in the ensuing clash two of the village guards were killed. Following this incident, the villagers fled Kuruçay_r.

At about 1am the following night soldiers of the gendarmerie in Silvan and Ba_dere came to the village, detained A. Kadir Bilen, Ömer Akbay and A. Selim Da_ku_u - three elderly men who were left behind as they were unfit to leave - and set the village, which consisted of some 60 houses, on fire.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Government forces are fighting armed members of the PKK over some of the most rugged terrain in the country. The PKK frequently visit villages to collect food and other supplies, which are given willingly or unwillingly. The village guard system is used as a method of holding down territory. Villagers are offered a salary in exchange for bearing arms against the PKK. When the system was established in the mid-1980s, village guards were supposed just to defend their own village. Now, village guards are deployed as a paramilitary force to participate in operations against other villages, carry out identification checks on roads, and other duties.

In theory, membership of the village guard corps is voluntary, but in practice villagers are caught between two fires. Many are reluctant to serve as village guards for fear of being killed by the PKK. However, those who refuse to join are subject to reprisals by the security forces, or village guards from neighbouring villages, who accuse them of actively or passively supporting the PKK. Security operations in villages are usually carried out by gendarmes (soldiers carrying out police duties in rural areas), members of Special Operations Teams (heavily armed units trained for close combat and operating under the control of the Interior Ministry), or village guards, or all three acting together.

Normally no judicial authority (such as a judge or prosecutor) is present. The inhabitants of the village are assembled in the village square, and those selected for interrogation are taken away to a police station, gendarmerie post or other place of detention, or are interrogated in the village itself. Unprotected by the most basic safeguards against torture, such villagers are frequently exposed to the most brutal treatment - sometimes resulting in terrible injuries or even death.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of A. Kadir Bilen, Ömer Akbay and A. Selim Da_ku_u, detained on 29 May 1996 in Kuruçay_r, Silvan province, and since held incommunicado at an unknown location;
- seeking assurances that the three aged villagers are not being subjected to torture or any other form of ill-treatment;
- urging that their whereabouts are established without delay and that they are promptly brought before a judge to be charged or released.

APPEALS TO:

1. Chief Prosecutor in Silvan:

Cumhuriyet Ba_savc_s_
Silvan C. Ba_savc_l____
Silvan, Turkey

Telegrams: C. Bassavcisi, Silvan, Turkey

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor

2. Silvan Gendarmerie Commander:

Silvan Jandarma Komutan_
Silvan Jandarma Komutanl____
Silvan, Turkey

Telegrams: Jandarma Komutanligi, Silvan, Turkey

Salutation: Dear Commander

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs:

Mr Emre Gönensay
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
D__i__leri Bakanl____
06100 Ankara

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and 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 June 1996.