

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Turkey: Three dead in attack on freedom of expression and religion

Amnesty International deplores the violent killings on 18 April of two Turkish nationals and a German at the *Zirve* Christian publishing house in Malatya. The three reportedly had their hands and feet bound together and their throats cut. They were all believed to be staff at the publishing house.

In recent months, staff at the *Zirve* publishing house had allegedly been receiving death threats from groups accusing them of missionary activities. The publishing house had also been the target of protests by nationalists groups in the past.

Amnesty International considers this brutal attack as an assault on the principles of freedom of religion and expression. It comes in a climate of growing intolerance in Turkey created and compounded by ongoing restrictions in law and practice on freedom of expression amongst journalists, human rights defenders and others attempting to engage in critical debate. The organization recalls the statement of the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, marking the International Day for Tolerance 2006, in which he said:

“... individuals and entire communities are being targeted for brutality and violence, simply because of their ethnic, religious, national or other identity. Such threats, whether large-scale genocide or the indignities of day-to-day bigotry, should trouble all of us. We must each strive to uphold the principles of tolerance, pluralism, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. We must always be ready to correct stereotypes and distorted images, and to speak up for victims of discrimination.

“Combating intolerance is in part a matter of legal protection. The right to freedom of religion -- and to freedom from discrimination based on religion -- has long been enshrined in international law, and incorporated into the domestic law of many countries.

“But the law is only a starting point. Any strategy to build understanding must depend heavily on education -- about different religions, traditions and cultures -- so that myths and distortions can be seen for what they are. We must also create opportunities for young people, offering them a credible alternative to the siren song of hate and extremism. And we must work to prevent the media from being used to spread hatred, or inflict humiliation, while safeguarding freedom of expression.

“In all of this, there is a crucial need for leadership by public figures and institutions.”

Amnesty International notes the condemnation by the Turkish authorities of these killings, but nevertheless remains concerned that the attack reveals a pattern of deadly intolerance in Turkey. In this regard, the organization recalls the killings of Andrea Santoro, a Catholic priest, in Trabzon in February 2006 and Hrant Dink, a Turkish-Armenian journalist, in Istanbul in January 2007.

Accordingly it urges the Turkish authorities to condemn all forms of intolerance and discrimination and uphold the rights to freedom of expression and religion enshrined in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to both of which Turkey is a state party.

Amnesty International also urges the Turkish authorities to ensure that these most recent killings are promptly, independently and effectively investigated, and that all suspected perpetrators are brought to justice.