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Turkey: Justice for victim tortured to death in custody

All those responsible for Engin Çeber's death must face justice in fair proceedings, Amnesty International said today as the 60 state officials implicated in his death prepare to go on trial on 21 January 2009.

Twenty-nine-year-old Engin Çeber died on 10 October 2008 after he was allegedly repeatedly kicked and beaten with wooden and metal bars both in police custody and in prison between 28 September and 7 October 2008. His autopsy report stated that his death was due to cerebral bleeding as a result of blunt trauma injuries consistent with those caused by blows to the head.

The Turkish authorities failed in their obligation to provide him with a prompt medical examination after his transfer to prison. This failure may have prevented his early transfer to a specialized institution, where his injuries could have been treated.

"Engin Çeber's death reflects a culture that tolerates torture in places of detention in Turkey. Delivery of justice will signal that state officials can be held accountable for violations of human rights. It will show that the Turkish criminal justice system is capable of protecting individual citizens," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

Amnesty International has exposed numerous cases of torture and other ill-treatment by law enforcement officials and an entrenched culture of impunity for those responsible.

As the date for the start of the trial approaches, Amnesty International is concerned that the vast majority of the 60 state officials indicted have not been suspended from duty. Four of them have been charged with "causing death through torture".

Amnesty International urges the Turkish authorities to order the immediate suspension from duty of all state officials implicated in Engin Çeber's death pending the outcome of the trial. It also calls for all state officials alleged to have taken part in torture and other ill-treatment to be charged appropriately.

Amnesty International said that in order to eliminate torture and other ill-treatment by law enforcement officials, the Turkish authorities should:

- develop an effective complaints mechanism able to carry out prompt, independent, impartial and thorough investigations into allegations of human rights violations committed by law enforcement officials;
- ensure that proper medical examinations are offered to detained or imprisoned persons as promptly as possible and medical care and treatment is provided whenever necessary;
- issue clear instructions to all prosecutors that they are obliged to order a prompt investigation where

there are allegations of ill-treatment or torture by detained persons and bring charges as appropriate.

“While proclaiming ‘zero tolerance for torture’, the Turkish authorities must demonstrate that those responsible for human rights violations will be brought to justice,” Nicola Duckworth said.