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Act now to stop unfair prosecutions of children under Turkey's anti-terror laws

Amnesty International has warned that draft legislative amendments scheduled to be discussed by the Parliament tomorrow, 20 July, would not, on their own, prevent violations of the rights of children.

“To end unfair prosecutions under anti-terrorism laws, the authorities must amend the definition of the crimes themselves, not only the ones under which children are sentenced,” said Andrew Gardner, Amnesty International’s researcher on Turkey.

Amnesty International’s research has shown that children, some as young as 12, have been prosecuted under anti-terrorism laws in adult courts, in violation of present domestic law, in provinces where no Children’s Courts exist.

The amendments would reduce or withdraw the sentences of some of the children convicted under anti-terrorism laws, a reform long demanded by civil society groups in Turkey. They also aim to end the prosecution of children in adult Special Heavy Penal Courts.

Overly broad and vague anti-terrorism legislation regarding “membership of a terrorist organization” and “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” under which the children are prosecuted would remain unchanged.

Amnesty International believes there is a risk that in places where Children’s Courts do not exist, children would continue to be prosecuted under the same procedures as adults.

“Action is needed to ensure that if the amendment is passed, children will no longer be tried in courts for adults. Existing Children’s Courts should be given regional jurisdiction and additional Children’s Courts created without delay.”

Background

Thousands of children in Turkey, some as young as 12, have been prosecuted under anti-terrorism legislation, solely for their alleged participation in demonstrations considered by the government to be in support of terrorism. The demonstrations are focused on issues of concern to members of the Kurdish community, and often involve clashes with the police.

In Amnesty International’s report, [*All children have rights: End unfair prosecutions of children under anti-terrorism legislation in Turkey*](#), the organization focuses on the systematic violations of the rights of the children committed during their arrest, detention and trial and makes wide ranging recommendations for legal change.