

## **TURKEY: KILLINGS MOUNT; HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST AND DOCTOR LATEST MURDER VICTIMS**

Helsinki Watch is deeply disturbed by the recent killings of lawyer Metin Can, the president of the Elazig branch of the Human Rights Association, and his colleague, Dr. Hasan Kaya. These killings are part of a continuing pattern of suspicious killings in southeast Turkey—killings of civilians who were deliberately targeted for assassination. *Reuters* reported on February 26, 1993, that 450 people had died in such assassinations in 1992.

The Turkish government has put the total even higher, at 534 killings. On February 10, *Cumhuriyet* reported that Minister of the Interior Ismet Sezgin had stated that in 1992 there had been 881 murders or attempted murders in the ten provinces under emergency rule in southeast Turkey, and that these 881 people were victims of mysterious crimes by unknown assailants (in Turkish: faili mechul).

After describing these assassinations and attempted assassinations as "crimes by unknown assailants," Minister Sezgin went on to say that 342 of the deaths had been caused by the PKK and 192 by Hizbullah. He also stated that the PKK had carried out 257 attempted assassinations and Hizbullah 90. Minister Sezgin said,

**These mysterious crimes are caused by the PKK or Hizbullah. This demonstrates clearly how baseless it is to claim that there is a counter-guerrilla involvement in these events.**

Minister Sezgin did not say what evidence he had to support his claim that the PKK was responsible for 599 crimes and Hizbullah for 282. Helsinki Watch has received no indication that anyone has been charged with any of these acts.<sup>1</sup>

It is widely believed in Turkey that such killings are carried out by a counter-guerrilla group associated with the security forces.

Minister Sezgin's attitude toward the unrest in southeast Turkey was reflected during a press conference on February 14 for national and foreign journalists at the Diyarbakir airport, when he said:

**If we wanted to, we could round up all of them, kill them and say they committed suicide (*Cumhuriyet*, February 15, 1993).**

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<sup>1</sup> On March 16, 1993, the Istanbul public prosecutor charged two Islamic radicals with the 1990 murders of Cetin Emec and Turan Dursun. Cetin Emec, murdered by two masked men on March 7, 1990, was a columnist and a former editor-in-chief of the mainstream newspaper *Hurriyet*. Turan Dursun, murdered outside his home by three men in September 1990, wrote for the left-wing journal, *2,000'e Dogru*. The two suspects were also charged with "attempting to subvert Turkey's constitution by force."

The tally of suspicious killings in the southeast has continued to mount in 1993. The Turkish Human Rights Foundation reported on March 20 that fifty-one persons were killed in suspicious circumstances in January 1993, and thirty-two in February. On February 18, the *Kurdistan News* reported a higher total for January: sixty-nine. The newsletter provided a list of the names of all sixty-nine with their professions, dates and places of death. The sixty-nine deaths represented a startling increase over the twelve suspicious killings reported by the Turkish Human Rights Foundation in January of 1992, the previous year.

### **Murders of Metin Can and Dr. Hasan Kaya**

Helsinki Watch has received information indicating that lawyer Metin Can, the president of the Elazig branch of the Turkish Human Rights Association, received a telephone call on February 21, 1993, from someone reportedly claiming to be a police officer. Mr. Can was reportedly told that a client of his had been involved in an automobile accident, and that he should come to the police station immediately. Mr. Can then called Dr. Hasan Kaya, a medical doctor, and the two left for the police station in Mr. Can's car. The next day, February 22, Mr. Can's car was found in the Yazikonak district of Elazig.

On February 27, the bodies of Mr. Can and Dr. Kaya were found outside of Tunceli. Both bodies reportedly bore marks of torture, and each man had apparently been shot dead by one bullet to the head.

No one has been charged with the murders.

Metin Can is not the first human rights activist to have been murdered in southeast Turkey. Vedat Aydin, 39, a former teacher who was the president of the People's Labor Party (HEP) in Diyarbakir and one of the founders of the Diyarbakir branch of the Turkish Human Rights Association (HRA) was taken from his home on July 5, 1991, by several armed men who reportedly identified themselves as police officers. On July 8, 1991, his body was found beside a road in Ergani, about 60 kilometers from Diyarbakir. Mr. Aydin's skull was fractured, both legs were broken, and his body had 15 or 16 bullet wounds.

Siddik Tan, a human rights activist who was a board member of the Batman branch of the HRA, was killed on June 20, 1992, in a neighbor's house in the Hurriyet quarter of Batman in southeast Turkey. He was reportedly slain by three armed attackers. Mr. Tan had lost the sight in one eye in an earlier attack on July 2, 1991, by a bomb that had been placed in his car.

No one has been charged with the death of either Vedat Aydin or Siddik Tan.

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Helsinki Watch has repeatedly protested to the Turkish government about its failure to investigate the extraordinary number of killings that have taken place in southeast Turkey since Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel's government took office in November 1991. These killings include the murders of thirteen journalists, four distributors of pro-Kurdish newspapers, political leaders, doctors, teachers and others in what appears to be a campaign to decapitate the Kurdish leadership in southeast Turkey.

Helsinki Watch again urges the Turkish government to investigate these killings and prosecute

**those responsible, as required by the standards of international law.**

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*This newsletter was written by Lois Whitman, the deputy director of Helsinki Watch.*

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