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TURKEY: FIVE JOURNALISTS KILLED; FREE EXPRESSION RESTRICTED

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Helsinki Watch is deeply concerned about the deaths of five journalists in southeast Turkey since February 1992 and the Turkish government's failure to bring any of the killers to justice. One journalist was killed by security forces in Cizre during the Kurdish New Year (*Nevroz*); one was allegedly killed by the PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party, a Kurdish separatist group that has been waging guerrilla warfare against security forces in the southeast since 1984); three were murdered by unknown assailants.

Helsinki Watch also deplores the fact that attacks on the press by the Turkish government have continued under the new coalition government that took office in November 1991; journalists have been physically assaulted and newspapers regularly confiscated in the past few months. Book publishing and Kurdish cultural rights are also still restricted.

DEATHS OF FIVE JOURNALISTS

The five journalists killed since February are:

Halit Gungen

A Kurdish journalist for the left-wing weekly journal, *2000'e Dogru* (Toward 2000), Halit Gungen was shot dead by unknown assailants on February 18, 1992. Gungen, 22, was killed in the Diyarbakir office of *2000'e Dogru* at 8:00 p.m. The February 16 issue of the journal had featured a cover story on the purported relationship between the Hizbullah (Party of God), an Islamic terrorist group, and the counter-guerrillas, an armed force allegedly linked to security forces in the southeast. Journal officials reported that the magazine and its writers had received many death threats and bomb warnings in the months preceeding Gungen's murder, but that police protection had been refused. No arrests have been made in connection with Gungen's death.

Cengiz Altun

Cengiz Altun, 24, the Batman correspondent for the weekly pro-Kurdish newspaper, *Yeni Ulke* (New Land), was killed by six bullets fired into his back on February 24 as he was on his way to work. A *Yeni Ulke* official alleged that Altun had recently been threatened with death at Gercus Gendarmerie Station. Mr. Altun had written articles about the alleged activities of government-backed counter-guerrillas; the most recent had been published in the February 2-8 issue. No arrests have been made.

Izzet Kezer

A journalist for the daily mainstream newspaper, *Sabah*, Izzet Kezer, was shot and killed by security forces in Cizre on March 23, during violence following the celebration of the Kurdish New Year (Nevroz) on March 21 and 22. During a state-imposed curfew, Kezer and other journalists emerged from their hotel waving white flags. No shooting was going on at the time. Kezer, at the head of the group, reached an intersection and was shot dead by security forces in an armored personnel carrier.[1] No one has been charged with his death.

Mecit Akgun

The body of Mecit Akgun, a reporter for *Yeni Ulke*, was found hanging from a telephone pole near Colova village in Nusaybin on June 2. Akgun had been missing for three weeks, having last been seen in Nusaybin. According to the Anatolia News Agency, an autopsy showed that Akgun had been strangled ten days earlier. A statement found on his body saying that "he was punished because he was a traitor" was allegedly signed by the PKK. No arrests have been made.

Hafiz Akdemir

On June 8, Hafiz Akdemir, a reporter in the Diyarbakir branch of a new daily newspaper, *Gundem*, was killed by a single bullet shot into the back of his head. Akdemir was shot at 8:00 a.m. fifty meters from his home in Diyarbakir. *Gundem* started publication on May 30, 1992; reporters stated that they had been receiving telephoned threats for several days -- several addressed to Akdemir. Mr. Akdemir had recently interviewed human rights delegations visiting the region and had written about them, as well as about the workings of counter-guerrilla forces in the region. No one has been charged with his death.

CONTINUING ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS AND JOURNALS

The deaths of the five journalists are linked to a pattern of violence and restrictions on press freedom that continues in Turkey.

Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel, announcing the new government's program to the Turkish Parliament on November 25, 1991, said: "Our government is determined to create and establish the concept of a free and independent press in line with contemporary currents and developments."

In spite of this pledge, freedom of the press is in as perilous a state today as it was under the previous administration of Turgut Ozal.

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[1] For further details, see News from Helsinki Watch, "Kurds Massacred: Turkish Forces Kill Scores of Peaceful Demonstrators," June 1992, p. 8.

Physical Attacks on Journalists

In early March, the Turkish Human Rights Foundation reported that during the first 100 days of the new government, security forces had kicked and hit with truncheons 24 journalists in six different events, including:

- Three journalists, Mehmet Aslan, Arap Filiz and Tarik Akcan, were injured on February 7 in Adana when they and several other journalists were beaten by police.

- Huseyin Akyol, the publisher of *Yeni Ulke*, was beaten along with ten other journalists by soldiers and special police team members in Diyarbakir on February 25, returning from the funeral of journalist Cengiz Altun.

Restrictions on Press Freedom

The pattern of confiscating left-wing and pro-Kurdish journals, and charging their writers and editors with crimes of thought, has continued unabated since the inception of the new government. A sampling of the dozens of incidents reported to Helsinki Watch includes:

- On May 18, Zeki Erdogan, the owner of the monthly journal *Ozgur Halk* (Free People), was sentenced to five months of imprisonment for publishing an interview with PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan.

- In Mid-May, columnist Omer Okcu of the daily *Zaman* was sentenced to one year in prison for an article in which he had criticized the Turkish Army for rejecting all applicants graduated from religious schools for its military academies. He was convicted under Article 159 of the Turkish Penal Code for "insulting the moral values of the Turkish Republic."

- On May 11, the 43rd issue of the biweekly journal *Mucadele* (Struggle) was confiscated by the Istanbul State Security Court on charges of "making propaganda for terrorist organizations" under Article 6 of the Anti-Terror Law.

- *Cumhuriyet* reported on April 28 that 44 of the 67 issues published by *Yeni Ulke* by the end of March 1992 had been confiscated by state security courts.

- On April 24, Sadik Gulec, a correspondent for the weekly magazine, *Gercel* (Actual), was detained in Istanbul during a funeral ceremony.

- Fourteen reporters and readers of the Islamic magazine *Taraf* were arrested in Istanbul on April 10 during a commemorative ceremony for Muslim writer and poet Necip Fazil. The ceremony had been permitted by police.

- On April 8, Burhan Karadeniz, a *Yeni Ulke* photographer, was arrested for taking pictures of security forces in Diyarbakir.

- The April 4 issue of *Yeni Ulke* was confiscated by the Istanbul State Security Court under Article 6 of the Anti-Terror Law because of an interview with a PKK commander and an article about a report on the PKK made to the United Nations.

- The first issue of the first Kurdish-language newspaper to be published in Turkey,

Rojname, was released in December 1991. On March 25, its 18-year-old office assistant, Cengiz Celik, was allegedly detained in Istanbul and tortured by plain-clothes police who occupied and searched the office. On March 26, owner Ahmet Zeki Okcuoglu discontinued publication saying, "under these conditions it is impossible to publish a Kurdish newspaper."

- Naif Yasar, *Yeni Ulke*'s Van correspondent, was detained on March 21 after photographing Newroz demonstrations.

- On March 20, Yahya Orhan, a *Yeni Ulke* correspondent in Batman, was detained while taking photos during a demonstration.

- The 38th issue of the journal *Mucadele* was confiscated by the Istanbul State Security Court on February 19 under Article 312 of the Penal Code. The journal was charged with printing an obituary that "praised an action that is proscribed as a crime."

- On February 19, the 18th issue of *Yeni Ulke* was confiscated by the Istanbul State Security Court for "separatist propaganda" in an article entitled, "State of War for the PKK."

- A trial began in Istanbul State Security Court on February 11 against journalist Yalcin Kucuk for his article entitled, "My Brother Ocalan," published in *Yeni Ulke*. Charged with separatist propaganda, Kucuk faces a possible five-year sentence.

- The fifteenth issue of the monthly journal, *Ozgur Halk* (Free People), was confiscated on February 1 by the Istanbul State Security Court under Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law because of an interview with Ismail Besikci and a translation of an interview with Abdullah Ocalan that had appeared in the *Turkish Daily News*.

- On January 28, the January 26 issue of *Yeni Ulke* was confiscated by the Istanbul State Security Court because an obituary announcement in the newspaper allegedly contained separatist propaganda.

- On January 20, two *Yeni Ulke* correspondents, Ali Cihat Unlu and Rifki Turan, were detained in Mus in relation to protest demonstrations against counter-guerrilla terror.

- The chief editor of the monthly *Newroz*, Remzi Bilget, was arrested on January 18 by a criminal court in Istanbul for making separatist propaganda in a message he had prepared for an evening of solidarity with the monthly review, *Deng*.

- The fourth issue of *Newroz* was confiscated by the Istanbul State Security Court on January 14 for separatist propaganda under Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law. The three previous issues had been confiscated on similar charges.

- The January 1992 issue of the monthly *Demokrat* was confiscated on January 7 under Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law by the Istanbul State Security Court for an

article by Ismail Besikci entitled, "The Kurds should gather their national assemblies."

- The eleventh issue of *Yeni Ulke* was confiscated On January 1 by the Istanbul State Security Court under Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law for an article entitled, "State Security Courts."

- The Turkish Human Rights Foundation reported on March 12 that, in the one hundred days since the coalition government came to power, sixteen journals and newspapers had been confiscated.

BOOK PUBLISHING RESTRICTED

Freedom to publish books continues to be attacked, according to our reports:

- On February 29, three books by Ismail Besikci were reported confiscated by the Ankara State Security Court under Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law, allegedly for "separatist propaganda." The books are: *Bilim, Resmi Ideologi, Devlet, Demokrasi ve Kurt Sorunu* (Science, Official Ideology, State, Democracy and the Kurdish Problem), *Cumhuriyet Halk Firkasi Tuzugu ve Kurt Sorunu* (The Republic People's Party's Statute and the Kurdish Problem) and *Zihnimizdeki Karakollarin Yikilmasi* (Collapse of Police Stations in Our Mind). The first two of these books were confiscated two years ago under Article 142 of the Penal Code. They were republished this year after the abolition of Article 142.

- A book called *1980-1990 Cezaevi Siir Antologisi*, jointly published by Melsa Publishing and Sorun Publications, was confiscated by the Istanbul State Security Court on February 1.

- On January 22, a trial under Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law of journalist Rafet Balli, former minister Serafettin Elci and publisher Mehmet Ali Ugur for a book entitled *The Kurdish File* began at Istanbul State Security Court. The book consists of a series of interviews with Kurdish intellectuals by Rafet Balli; it was confiscated last year for separatist propaganda. Elci is one of the people interviewed in the book.

- On January 7, a book by Edip Polit, *We Have Turned Dawns into Newroz*, was confiscated by the Ankara State Security Court under the Anti-Terror Law for separatist propaganda, and its publisher, Hikmet Kocak, was interrogated by the public prosecutor.

- The Turkish Human Rights Foundation reported on March 12 that fourteen books had been confiscated during the government's first one hundred days in office.

CULTURAL RIGHTS OF THE KURDISH COMMUNITY RESTRICTED

Cultural rights of the Kurdish community have also reportedly been violated. According to the BBC, on February 17, the Mesopotamian Cultural Society, a small school that had started teaching Kurdish to forty students two

hours a day, four days a week, was ordered by the Ministry of Education to stop the classes on the ground that the National Security Council and the Council of Ministers must approve the teaching of foreign languages. The director of the school told the BBC that he had checked and found that no such approval had been obtained for the teaching of French, English, German or Persian, and that the Ministry of Education had not hindered the teaching of those languages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Helsinki Watch is deeply disturbed by the continuing restrictions on free expression experienced by the Turkish people. Thus far, the new government has not lived up to its promises and, in fact, has continued the pattern of repression Helsinki Watch has reported on since 1983.

Concerning the killings of five journalists since February, Helsinki Watch urges the government of Turkey to investigate these deaths vigorously and to bring to justice those responsible, whether members of security forces, the PKK, or others.

Concerning the treatment of journalists and restrictions on freedom of expression, Helsinki Watch, as it has done before, recommends that the Turkish government:

- Cease all legal actions against the press, writers and publishers, that are based on their writings or publishing.
- Forbid physical attacks on the press by security forces and punish any officers who carry out such attacks.
- Amend the Constitution to remove those portions that restrict freedom of expression.
- Amend the Penal Code to remove Articles 158, 159, 311, 312 and other articles that restrict freedom of expression.
- Abolish the Anti-Terror Law.
- Permit free expression of the cultural identity of the Kurdish minority in Turkey.

Helsinki Watch also urges the United States government to acknowledge Turkey's abuses of free expression and to use its influence to encourage the government of Turkey to undertake the reforms recommended by Helsinki Watch.

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This newsletter was written by Lois Whitman, Deputy Director of Helsinki Watch.

News From Helsinki Watch is a publication of Helsinki Watch, an independent organization created in 1978 to monitor domestic

and international compliance with the human rights provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. The Chair is Jonathan Fanton; Vice Chair, Alice H. Henkin; Executive Director, Jeri Laber; Deputy Director, Lois Whitman; Staff Counsel, Holly Cartner; Research Associates, Erika Dailey, Rachel Denber and Ivana Nizich; Associates, Pamela Cox, Christina Derry and Elisabeth Socolow.

Helsinki Watch is a division of Human Rights Watch, which includes Africa Watch, Americas Watch, Asia Watch, Middle East Watch, and the Fund for Free Expression. The Chair is Robert L. Bernstein and the Vice Chair is Adrian W. DeWind. Aryeh Neier is Executive Director; Kenneth Roth, Deputy Director; Holly J. Burkhalter, Washington Director; and Susan Osnos, Press Director.

Helsinki Watch is affiliated with the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, which is based in Vienna.