

TURKEY: TWENTY-ONE DEATHS IN DETENTION IN 1993

Helsinki Watch is deeply disturbed by the increasing number of deaths in detention in Turkey. Twenty-one people died in suspicious circumstances while in police custody in 1993. These deaths took place in police or gendarmerie stations¹ throughout Turkey during the interrogation phase of investigations. They follow on the deaths of at least seventeen people who died while under interrogation in police custody in 1992.² This makes a horrifying total of thirty-eight deaths in detention under the coalition governments of former Prime Minister (now President) Suleyman Demirel and current Prime Minister Tansu Ciller.

On assuming office in November 1991, the coalition government promised to end torture. These deaths show that that promise has not been kept. Such deaths violate international standards and agreements that forbid torture and deprivation of life, including the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and the United Nations Convention against Torture. Turkey has signed all of these documents.

Of the twenty-one deaths in detention in 1993, Turkish authorities have asserted that four died of heart attacks, five committed suicide (one by jumping from a 1.5 meter high water tank), three died of various illnesses, and one by suffocation while vomiting. Nine of the deaths took place in western Turkey: three in Istanbul, two in Ankara, one in Izmir, one in Gaziantep, one in Aydin and one in Eskisehir. Twelve died in southeast Turkey, where a separatist group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has been waging guerrilla war against security forces since 1984. Action has been taken against security forces in only one case; in that case, a police officer was questioned briefly and released.

Suspects of both political and ordinary crimes--children as well as adults--are routinely and systematically tortured in police interrogation centers in western and southeast Turkey. Appalling torture techniques are regularly used: suspension by the arms or wrists, which are often first tied behind the back of the naked, blindfolded victim; electric shock to the genitals and other sensitive parts of the body; *falaka* (beating the soles of the feet until they swell and bleed); rape, both vaginal and anal, sometimes using truncheons or gun barrels; shooting highly-pressurized water at victims who are sometimes constrained in rubber tires; severe beatings with sticks and truncheons; pulling out victims' toenails or fingernails; pulling victims by the hair, sometimes pulling out clumps of hair; pulling hair from victims' beards or

¹ The gendarmerie is a military force that carries out policing duties in rural areas.

² In February 1993, Helsinki Watch reported sixteen such deaths. See: Helsinki Watch Newsletter, *Sixteen Deaths in Detention in 1992*. Since then a seventeenth has come to light: the death of Yusuf Cadar, a Christian Yezidi, whose body was found on December 1, 1992, with bound eyes, hands and feet after ten days of interrogation in Mardin in southeast Turkey.

mustaches; death threats and threats to kill family members; placing victims on blocks of ice; forcing victims' heads into excrement; placing victims in small cells with attack dogs who attack and bite them.

Helsinki Watch has already reported on the deaths in detention of twelve detainees in 1993.³ Since those reports, nine additional deaths have taken place in detention:

Baki Erdogan, 27, detained in Aydin on August 18, 1993, suspected of membership in the Devrimci Sol (Revolutionary Left) organization. Erdogan died in the Aydin Security Directorate (police headquarters) on August 22. Police reported that Erdogan had died of "tuberculosis and insufficiency of the respiratory system." Eyewitness accounts and photographs and videotapes revealed that Erdogan had been tortured. A Turkish doctor working with the Turkish Human Rights Foundation was not allowed to see the government's autopsy report. (*Cumhuriyet*, October 9, 1993.)

Harun Cetin, 20, a Kurdish student detained at Istanbul University on March 15, 1993, after a bomb explosion in a bank in the Avcilar quarter of Istanbul. Shortly after his detention, Cetin was taken to Cerrahpasa Hospital, where he was operated on for a brain injury. Cetin never regained consciousness and died on September 5, 1993. (World Organization Against Torture, Geneva, September 8, 1993.)

Sefik Kaplan, 61, an imam (religious leader) detained by security forces in a raid on a village in Bitlis on September 5, 1993. Mr. Kaplan, the father of eight children, died during his interrogation on September 8. Relatives charged that a military officer told them at the gendarmerie station to which Mr. Kaplan had been taken that he was among twelve detained persons who would be killed. After his death, authorities stated that he had committed suicide, using his belt. (*Ozgur Gundem*, September 15, 1993.)

Engin Atay, 22, a university student detained in September in the Eskisehir bus terminal on his way to Ankara. Atay was reportedly taken first to the city security center for questioning. Then, handcuffed, he was reportedly taken to his own apartment on the eighth floor of a building in Eskisehir. Atay's body was then seen crashing through the roof of a parked car. Police said he had jumped from the eighth floor with his hands cuffed behind his back. After his death, police reported that Atay was a "left-wing activist," but provided no evidence for the charge. (*The Turkish Probe*, September 15, 1993.)

Haci Sansak, 56, a jeweler detained in Cizre district of Sirnak on October 3, 1993. Sansak died at the Sirnak Security Directorate the night he was detained. Police alleged that he had died of a heart attack; relatives challenged the statement. (*Ozgur Gundem*, October 6, 1993.)

Bilen Cifci, 24, a taxi driver detained in Ankara on October 9 on allegations of theft. Cifci died in the Ankara Security Directorate. Police claimed that he had committed suicide by jumping from the fourth floor of police headquarters. Police authorities reported that the death was not considered to be suspicious. (*Cumhuriyet, Sabah*, October 13, 1993.)

Selman Karabacak, a prisoner detained in Manisa E Type Prison. On October 22, 1993, Karabacak

³ In June 1993 Helsinki Watch reported on four deaths in detention that had thus far taken place in 1993. See Helsinki Watch newsletter, *Turkey: Four Deaths in Detention*, June 1993. In August 1993, we reported on eight additional deaths. See Helsinki Watch newsletter, *Turkey: Twelve Deaths in Detention*, August 18, 1993.

was taken to Izmir Yesilyurt State Hospital where he died; the diagnosis was cerebral hemorrhage. Reportedly no autopsy was performed. (*Ozgur Gundem*, October 29, 1993.)

Kemal Canpolat, 27, detained during a military operation in Cinar district of Diyarbakir on October 31, 1993. Canpolat died at Diyarbakir Security Directorate where he was interrogated. Canpolat's corpse was found by his family at the Diyarbakir State Hospital morgue on Saturday, November 13. Hospital officials reported that Canpolat had been severely tortured, attested to by bruises on his head and chest. In addition, his toenails had been pulled out. (*Ozgur Gundem*, November 15, 1993.)

Filit Er, detained with his father and brother in late November in the village of Hoshaber near the town of Igdir in southeast Turkey. His father, Teyfik, reported:

Police raided our house and tortured myself and my sons Mehmet and Filit. Then they tortured us again in the police headquarters in Igdir. The following day special forces raided the house again, took my daughter outside and tortured her, causing her to lose consciousness. They tortured us for three days. They said that my son had lost consciousness and then they gave me his dead body. It was covered with bruises and his arms were broken. (*Ozgur Gundem*, November 28, 1993.)

The twelve deaths reported by Helsinki Watch earlier, including one man who died in December but whose death was not reported until January, are:

Ibrahim Sevilgen, 60, a construction worker from Bozatti village of Eruh district of Siirt. Mr. Sevilgen was employed at Dikbogaz Gendarmerie Station in southeast Turkey. He died on the night of December 24, 1992, while in detention at Cirpi Gendarmerie Station in southeast Turkey. Siirt Member of Parliament Zubeyir Aydar reported that Mr. Sevilgen had been severely tortured. (*Cumhuriyet*, January 2, 1993.)

Haci Ibrahim Dilek, a farmer detained in Baristepe village of Midyat district of Mardin in southeast Turkey on March 20, 1993. Mr. Dilek's body was found near the Midyat-Gercus road on March 30. On April 19 an autopsy was performed by a forensic team made up of Gercus State Prosecutor Kemal Cakir, Dr. Hikmet Celikbas, Adnan Kafaf, Cemil Tuncer and Vedat Ari. The team issued this statement:

The body was found two kilometres away from Yolagzi in Midyat, dumped in a hole with a large stone placed on the right foot. There were marks of beating covering almost the entire body. There were also rope marks on the wrists, the result of being dragged by the wrists behind a vehicle, and the body showed drag marks. From an injury to the anus it appears that a hard object had been inserted as a method of torture. The anus had been ruptured.

From our forensic examination we came to the conclusion that this man had died as a result of torture. We can confirm this without any hesitation. (*Ozgur Gundem*, April 26, 1993.)

Ibrahim Ekincl, a villager from Ormanici village of Guclukonak district of Sirnak in southeast Turkey. Several residents of Ormanici village filed a complaint with the European Human Rights Commission in February 1993, claiming that they had been tortured after a raid carried out on their village

in February by security forces. The villagers reported that Ibrahim Ekinçi, one of the 45 people detained following the raid, had died from torture inflicted on him while he was in detention. *Cumhuriyet* newspaper reported on April 8 that the villagers said:

The soldiers gathered all the men in the center of the village. They tortured everyone until the evening. On the one hand they were torturing the villagers, on the other hand they were shooting animals in the village with guns. All of our belongings, including our houses, were burned.

Kudbettin Tekin, detained on April 20, 1993, in Tepecik village of Bismil district of Diyarbakir, in southeast Turkey, allegedly because he had refused to serve as a village guard. His body was delivered to his family shortly afterward. Officers of the Bismil Gendarmerie Station where Mr. Tekin had been detained claimed that he committed suicide by hanging himself on the pipes of a central heating radiator. Mr. Tekin's family stated that they believed he had been killed while in detention. (*Cumhuriyet*, May 13.)

Vakkas Dost, 30, detained for "drinking alcoholic liquor in the street," on May 28, 1993. Mr. Dost died on May 29 at about 3:00 a.m. at Istanbul Kumkapi Police Station where he was in police custody. An autopsy reportedly revealed that Mr. Dost died because of internal bleeding which occurred when his spleen was torn by a blow. Mr. Dost's brother, Ibrahim Dost, reported:

According to Fevzi Yesilay [who had been detained with Vakkas Dost], my brother was ruthlessly beaten at the police station. My brother fell down for a moment and started to vomit. We think that he died at that time. We saw the corpse in the morgue. There were traces of blows on his forehead and one of his arms appeared to be broken.

Fevzi Yesilay reported:

Vakkas fell down in consequence of a kick in his stomach and started to vomit. When I took him to the washbasin to wash his face and hands, he was not able to speak.

Police officer Nurettin Ozturk was reportedly detained concerning the death of Vakkas Dost and released a short time later. (*Cumhuriyet*, May 31, 1993.)

Voysl Kaymaz, 30, detained by security forces on June 11, 1993, in Karakopru village of Cinar district of Diyarbakir, in southeast Turkey, and found dead shortly thereafter. Officials stated that he had committed suicide by jumping from a water tank, 1.5 meters high. Relatives who saw the body in the Diyarbakir Hospital morgue claimed that his head had been badly beaten and his toenails pulled out. (*Ozgur Gundem*, June 19, 1993.)

Abdussolam Orak, detained on June 10, 1993, in Anadere village of Tatvan district of Bitlis in southeast Turkey reportedly because of an unauthorized gun found in his house. Mr. Orak reportedly fell ill as a result of torture inflicted on him at Tatvan Gendarmerie Command where he was interrogated, and was taken to Diyarbakir State Hospital on June 20. He died on June 23 at the hospital. (*Azadi, Ozgur Gundem*, June 28, 1993.)

Mehmet Ozturk, a youth detained on June 20, 1993, by gendarmes in Cay village of Alapli district of Zonguldak on the Black Sea coast in connection with a prison sentence against him. Mr. Ozturk died shortly

thereafter. Officers from the gendarmerie station denied relatives' charges that Mr. Ozturk had been beaten, and said that he had been drunk when detained, and had died because of suffocation while vomiting. (*Cumhuriyet*, June 29, 1993.)

Siddik Oncu, an imam (religious leader) detained by soldiers on June 21, 1993, in Kerkatik village of Cinar Diyarbakir. Mr. Oncu died in Diyarbakir. His wife, Nezahat Oncu, reported that her husband had been beaten by soldiers while being detained. "In the autopsy report given to us," she said, "it is written that Siddik died as a result of an illness. The same is written in the death document. But we do not believe that he died for that reason. There were bruises on his hips, chin and cheeks. Also there were wounds on his hips from beating. We saw rope traces on his wrists and neck. His nails had turned purple." (*Ozyur Gundem*, July 12, 1993.)

Riza Urun, taken to Cankaya Police Station in Ankara on July 2, 1993, in connection with a disagreement about a deed. Mr. Urun died shortly thereafter. His wife, Sahverdi Urun, reported that Riza Urun was beaten by police in front of her and their son, Atilla Urun. The official report states that death was caused by a heart attack. Ankara Member of Parliament Uluc Gurkan, declaring that Mr. Urun had been killed under torture, told Parliament that Public Prosecutor Tuncer Ozdemir had prevented an autopsy on Riza Urun's body. (*Cumhuriyet*, July 7, 1993.)

Yucel Dolan, 25, detained in Hazro district of Diyarbakir in southeast Turkey on July 29, 1993. His father, Resul Dolan, the mayor of Hazro, reported: "After being detained, my son was taken to Diyarbakir. They tortured and killed him in two days. He had been tortured severely. All of his body was covered with traces of blows. Bruises on his genitals indicated electric shocks. He had been hit with a hard object on the back of his head." Yucel Dolan died on August 2 in Diyarbakir Hospital. The autopsy stated that he had died of a heart attack. (*Cumhuriyet*, August 5, 1993.)

Selahattin Dortbudak, detained on August 3rd by gendarmes in Bahceli village of Nizip district of Gaziantep in southeast Turkey and charged with theft. Mr. Dortbudak died in the gendarmerie station while being interrogated. Authorities reported that he had died of a heart attack. His mother, Gullu Dortbudak, reported: "My son was stained with blood. There was a great scar on his right shoulder. There were wounds and scars on his head and purple bruises on his stomach. Why would wounds and scars occur on the body of a person who died on a heart attack?" (*Ozyur Gundem*, August 9, 1993.)

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Helsinki Watch calls on the government of Turkey to order an immediate end to the use of torture by security forces, to investigate promptly, thoroughly and impartially each death in detention, and to prosecute those responsible.

Helsinki Watch calls on the United States government to publicly condemn the use of torture by Turkish officials and to use its best efforts to persuade the Turkish government to order torture abolished.

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

Helsinki Watch was established in 1978 to monitor domestic and international compliance with the human

rights provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. The chair of Helsinki Watch is Jonathan Fanton and the vice chair is Alice Henkin. Jeri Laber is executive director; Lois Whitman is deputy director; Holly Cartner and Julie Mertus are counsel; Erika Dailey, Rachel Denber, Ivana Nizich, and Christopher Panico are research associates; and Christina Derry, Ivan Lupis, Alexander Petrov and Isabelle Tin-Aung are associates.

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