

## **TURKEY**

### **Eleven Deaths in Police Detention Since February; Three Were Children Who "Committed Suicide"**

Helsinki Watch is deeply concerned about continuing reports from Turkey of deaths during police detention. Since February 1992, eleven people who have been detained by security forces have died in suspicious circumstances. Of the eleven deaths, eight took place in southeast Turkey, one in Adana, one in Gumushane, and one in Artvin.

Helsinki Watch is particularly dismayed that in four of the cases, security forces alleged that the detained person had committed suicide--and three of these "suicides" were children, aged thirteen, sixteen and sixteen. The fourth "suicide" was eighteen years old.

To our knowledge, an investigation has begun in only one of the eleven cases.

In a December 1991 newsletter, Helsinki Watch detailed the deaths of fifteen men who had died in suspicious circumstances while detained by security forces during 1991.

The deaths since February are doubly disturbing because of the new coalition government's pledge to end torture. Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel's program, presented to the Turkish Grand National Assembly in November 1991, states: "Torture is a crime. Claims on this matter directed towards Turkey in recent years have been disturbing to us. It is our duty to put an end to this."

The eleven deaths since February are:

- **Hasan Guldal**

Hasan Guldal was detained on May 23 in Sivasat district of Artvin in northeast Turkey, charged with membership in an illegal organization. He appears to have died sometime after June 1 while in detention in Artvin Provincial Gendarmerie Command, where he was allegedly tortured during interrogation.

Huseyin Gocer, who was detained with Hasan Guldal and is now incarcerated in Nevsehir E Type Prison, reported to the Turkish Human Rights Foundation that both he and Mr. Guldal were badly tortured in detention. Mr. Gocer reported last seeing Mr. Guldal on May 28; his body was swollen, he was continuously vomiting blood and he then went into a coma. Mr. Gocer reported that security forces later told him, "We killed [Hasan Guldal] while he was escaping and then threw his corpse into Coruh River."

- **Thirteen-year-old student**

A thirteen-year-old student who was detained on April 29, charged with murder, died in his cell in

**Gumushane Closed Prison in northeast Turkey on May 2. Officials alleged that the student, whose name was not disclosed, had had a nervous breakdown and committed suicide.**

• **Agit Salman**

**Agit Salman, a forty-two-year-old taxi driver, was detained by political police in Adana on April 27. He died in custody on April 29 at Security Headquarters in Adana, where he was interrogated. Police officials stated that an autopsy showed that Agit Salman had died of a heart attack. His wife, Bedie Salman, said "My husband was killed by torture. Agit had no illness up to now." Photographs of the body allegedly showed that Agit Salman had been beaten.**

• **Mehmet Yilmaz**

**Mehmet Yilmaz, eighty years old, was detained on April 21 in connection with operations staged by security forces in Batman in southeast Turkey. Interrogated at Batman Security Directorate, Yilmaz became ill and was taken to Diyarbakir State Hospital on April 24. He died on April 25 and was buried in Batman on April 26; 2,000 people attended his funeral.**

**The autopsy report stated that death was caused by bleeding in the brain. Batman officials asserted that Yilmaz suffered bleeding in the brain when his blood pressure rose, not because of torture. Yilmaz's wife, Ayse Yilmaz, reported that her husband had not had health complaints before his detention.**

• **Kadir Kurt**

**Kadir Kurt, thirty-five, was detained on the morning of April 19 in Birik village in Bismil district of Diyarbakir, in southeast Turkey. He died that night in the Gendarmerie Battalion Command where he was interrogated. Davut Kurt, Kadir Kurt's brother, who had been detained with him, said:**

**They tortured my brother beside me. They inserted a truncheon into his anus. One of my hands and a rib were broken by torture.**

**Kadir Kurt reportedly died from internal bleeding caused by pressure on his lungs from a broken sternum.**

• **Mithat Kutlu**

**Bank officer Mithat Kutlu was detained on April 18 in the Bismil district of Diyarbakir. He died in custody six hours later. The autopsy report allegedly showed that his death was caused by a brain hemorrhage and internal bleeding.**

**A person who was detained with Mithat Kutlu reported:**

**They struck his head with truncheons and clubs. When he got a hard kick to his stomach, he lost his voice. He was left near us and we requested his hospitalization, but they refused. He was bleeding from his ears and mouth. He died shortly afterwards.**

- **Kesan Ali**

**Kesan Ali, sixteen, died in mid-April in police custody in Diyarbakir. According to *The Guardian*, Kesan Ali was taken from his house by eight police officers a few days after the Nevroz celebrations in late March. Officials reported that Kesan Ali had committed suicide in custody. His family challenged this, reporting that part of his head was missing, and that he was almost unrecognizable. The rest of his body allegedly showed signs of torture as well.**

- **Tahir Seyhan**

**Tahir Seyhan, an official of the People's Labor Party (HEP) in Dargecit in Mardin province, died on April 11 after undergoing four days of interrogation. According to Amnesty International, the autopsy report indicated brain trauma as the cause of death.**

**A relative of Mr. Seyhan has alleged that the officer in charge of the interrogation told Mr. Seyhan: "You are a dead man now." A staff member of the hospital where Mr. Seyhan died reportedly said, "It is an inhuman case. He was brutally tortured. His body was all in pieces."**

- **Biseng Anik**

**Biseng Anik, a sixteen-year-old high school girl, was detained in Sirnak, in southeast Turkey, on March 25, during a house-to-house sweep of Sirnak following the unrest that took place during Nevroz, the Kurdish New Year. She died in suspicious circumstances on March 28 while in police custody.**

**Mustafa Malay, the governor of Sirnak province, reportedly released a statement on her death that said:**

**Biseng Anik was detained on 25 March. When the custody rooms were crowded, some detainees were put in other rooms to testify. Together with the girl who committed suicide were two other girls. Therefore, Biseng was taken to another room used by the security forces. In that room she committed suicide with a gun she found under the bed. The autopsy showed that she committed suicide.**

- **Burhan Serikli**

**Burhan Serikli, age eighteen, was detained during operations carried out at the beginning of March in Ulular and Cefani settlements of Besiri district of Batman in southeast Turkey. He died in the Batman Gendarmerie Station where he was interrogated. The date of death is unknown, but he was buried on March 8 in Binek village of Kozluk district.**

**The president of the Batman branch of the Turkish Human Rights Association, Sedat Ozevin, stated that he had discussed Serikli's death with the Batman governor, who had told him that Serikli had hanged himself with his blindfold. Ozevin said, "It is not possible to commit suicide with such a small piece of cloth. An investigation should be made into the case and the truth disclosed. The right to life should not be violated indifferently."**

**An autopsy was performed and allegedly confirmed that Serikli had hanged himself. Villagers, however, reported that the body showed bruising under the armpits.**

• **Refik Akin**

**Refik Akin was detained on January 29 by security forces in Sazlibasi village, Korkut district of Mus, in southeast Turkey, on suspicion of possession of an automatic gun. He was allegedly beaten while forced to lie naked in the snow. Mus Member of Parliament Muzaffer Demir said that Refik Akin had died on February 1 in Elazig State Hospital due to his beatings and his exposure to the cold. *Cumhuriyet* reported that the Mus Prosecution Office had opened an investigation into his death.**

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**Torture in Turkey usually takes place in special sections of police stations, now called "Branches to Fight Terrorism," during the initial interrogation of a suspect. Human rights activists and lawyers who represent defendants tell Helsinki Watch that between eighty and ninety percent of political suspects and fifty percent of detainees suspected of ordinary crimes report having been tortured during detention.**

**Torture includes suspension by the arms or wrists while naked; the use of electric shock to sensitive parts of the body; directing high-pressure water at victims; *falaka* (beating the soles of the feet), and other horrifying techniques.**

**Torture is not limited to adults. Helsinki Watch issued a report in January 1992 entitled: *"Nothing Unusual: The Torture of Children in Turkey"* that details the appalling torture of children under eighteen years of age.**

**The Turkish Parliament recently passed a legal reform bill that included provisions that a detainee be permitted immediate access to an attorney and that the length of the detention period be shortened. This bill was vetoed by President Turgut Ozal. At this writing it is not known whether Parliament will pass the legislation over President Ozal's veto.**

### **Recommendations**

**For many years, Helsinki Watch has been reporting on the routine use of torture in Turkey and has urged the abolition of torture, suggesting specific steps that the government could take to accomplish that goal. We urge the government of Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel to carry out its pledge to end torture and specifically to:**

- **Acknowledge the pattern of torture in police detention centers and take steps to end it.**
- **Permit detainees the right to be represented by attorneys from the moment of detention, as promised in a rarely-enforced September 1989 decree and in legislation now before the parliament.**
- **Shorten permissible detention periods for those suspected of both ordinary and political**

**crimes.**

- **Prohibit the use in court of confessions obtained by torture.**
- **Increase the possible sentences for the crime of torture.**
- **Prosecute torturers.**
- **Allow the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international organizations to visit detainees and prisoners on a regular basis.**

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*This report was written by Lois Whitman.*

*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 of Helsinki Watch is Jonathan Fanton and the vice chair is Alice Henkin. Jeri Laber is the executive director; Lois Whitman is deputy director; Holly Cartner is staff counsel; Erika Dailey, Rachel Denber and Ivana Nizich are research associates; and Pamela Cox and Christina Derry are associates.*

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