

February 10, 1991

## **TURKEY: FIVE DEATHS IN DETENTION IN JANUARY**

Helsinki Watch is deeply concerned about the reported deaths in January 1991 of five people who had been detained by police in Turkey. We call upon the government of Turkey to investigate each of these deaths thoroughly, and, where improper use of lethal force is found, to prosecute vigorously those responsible.

The five men who died in suspicious circumstances were Tefvik Timur, Cumali Copur, Birtan Altunbas, Haydar Arman and Ihsan Basbugu. Three died in Ankara, one in Cizre and one in Nevsehir. Authorities alleged that two had killed themselves.

### **TEVFIK TIMUR**

*Cumhuriyet* reported on January 15, 1991, that Tefvik Timur had been detained in Cizre on January 5, 1991. Police turned his body over to his family on January 14. The General Secretary of the Socialist Party, Yalcin Buyukdagli, alleged that Mr. Timur's death was caused by torture carried out by police during their interrogation.

### **CUMALI COPUR**

Cumali Copur, a convict sentenced for theft who was an inmate in Nevsehir E-type prison, committed suicide on January 11, 1991, by hanging himself with a bedsheet, according to Ahmet Sukru Dagli, the Nevsehir public prosecutor. *Cumhuriyet* reported on January 13 that the case was under investigation.

### **BIRTAN ALTUNBAS**

Muzaffer Ilhan Erdost, the president of the Ankara branch of the Turkish Human Rights Association, reported on January 22, 1991, that a youth named Birtan Altunbas, who had been detained for 15 days at the Political Section of Ankara Police Headquarters, had died as a result of torture. Mr. Altunbas died at Gulhane Military Hospital on January 16, 1991, and was buried in Malkara, Tekirdag, on January 18. A student named Murat Bobrek, who had been in detention with Birtan Altunbas, said that he had seen Altunbas being tortured.

On January 25, *Milliyet* reported that Minister of Justice Oltan Sungurlu had reported that the

public prosecutor had opened an investigation into the case. *Gunes* reported on January 31 that the autopsy report on Altinbas' body had not been given to his family, although they had requested it.

### **HAYDAR ARMAN**

The Human Rights Foundation of Turkey reported on February 1, 1991, that Haydar Arman had died in prison on January 24, 1991, after having been detained for some time at the Ankara Security Directorate. Arman's wife, Sukran Arman, told the Ankara branch of the Turkish Human Rights Association that her husband had died of torture. "His corpse was given to me from the morgue on January 26, and we buried him on the same day," she reported. "I saw his head when he was being buried; one side was purple. There were red marks on his forehead. The men who went to get the corpse said that his testicles were all black. The flesh was ripped off on the tips of his toes and fingers." Tekiye Arman, Haydar Arman's mother, also stated that her son was healthy when he was detained. "They took my son in healthy and gave him back dead."

### **IHSAN BASBUGU**

According to *Milliyet*, Ihsan Basbugu, a youth who had been detained on January 31, 1991, charged with stealing two packs of cigarettes, died at Anafartlar Police Station where he had been detained. Authorities claimed that Basbugu had committed suicide. Basbugu's father said: "I examined my son's body closely at the morgue. There were no signs of suicide ... but there were marks of beating; I saw purple bruises under his arm pits and on his feet."

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The deaths in detention of these five men are not isolated instances. In January, Helsinki Watch described in its annual report credible reports of seven deaths in detention under suspicious circumstances during 1990. In three of the cases, security forces alleged that the detainees had committed suicide. The seven were:

- Emine Yilmaz, 22, who was arrested in April on charges of using counterfeit German marks, died the evening of the day she was jailed. The Public Prosecutor opened an investigation, and the corpse was sent to the Istanbul Forensic Institute for analysis.

- Ali Akkan died in police custody in Antalya on May 6. He had been suspected of giving shelter to a member of an illegal organization. Authorities claimed that he committed suicide by jumping out the window of Antalya Police Headquarters. Akkan's family and the Human Rights Association have asked for an autopsy.

- Besir Algan, 36, a peasant who, according to Member of Parliament Fuat Atalay, had been taken into custody and then shot dead by security forces in the village of Budakli, in the province of Mardin, died on May 22.

- Serdar Cekic Abbasoglu, 23, a robbery suspect, was found dead in bed in Ankara Central Jail on June 4, following interrogation. The authorities claimed that there were no signs of blows on Abbasoglu's body, but 67 fellow detainees asserted that he had been bleeding from his nose and mouth, and that his bed was stained with blood on the day of his death.

- Ibrahim Ates, a robbery suspect, was detained on July 15. He was allegedly killed by being thrown from the fourth-floor balcony of a police station in Mersin ten days later. Police claimed the death was a suicide.

- Abdurrahim Tanribilir, from the Duzova village of Cizre, was, according to his mother, beaten at home and then detained on September 7. His body was returned on September 8. The authorities said that

he had committed suicide.

- Yakup Aktas died in detention in the Interrogation Center at Mardin Gendarmery Regiment Commandership, one week after his detention on November 18. Security forces alleged that he had suffered a heart attack. His family reported a head wound and bruises on body.

In Turkey, torture usually takes place in the political sections of police headquarters during the initial interrogation of a suspect. Human rights activists and lawyers report, as they have for some years, that over 90 percent of political suspects are tortured, as are over 50 percent of people suspected of ordinary crimes. Torture in police stations includes suspending the victim for prolonged periods, applying electric shock, directing highly pressurized water at the victim, and *falaka* (beating the soles of the feet).

Torture is not confined to adults. Some children under 18 (including some as young as 11 or 12) have allegedly been beaten by police after having been detained for such offenses as writing "No to War" on a public wall, demonstrating on May Day, fighting, and belonging to an illegal organization.

Nor is torture confined to police stations. In 1990, several credible reports alleged a resurgence of torture in prisons, largely in the form of mass beatings with truncheons or wooden sticks.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Helsinki Watch has been gravely concerned for some time about the routine use of torture during interrogations at police stations in Turkey. We have recommended in the past, and continue to recommend to the Turkish government that it:

- Acknowledge the pattern of torture in police detention centers and take steps to end it.
- Enforce a September 1989 decree that guaranteed detainees the right to be represented by attorneys from the moment of detention; the provisions of this decree have never been carried out.
- 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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## **HOW YOU CAN HELP**

Letters urging investigations into deaths in detention, as well as letters urging action on the recommendations listed, should be sent to the Turkish officials listed below:

President Turgut Ozal  
Office of the President  
Cankaya  
Ankara, Turkey

Minister of Justice Oltan Sungurlu  
Adalet Bakanligi  
Bakanliklar  
Ankara, Turkey

Ambassador Nuzhet Kandemir  
Embassy of Turkey  
1714 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20036

## **PREVIOUS HELSINKI WATCH REPORTS ON TURKEY**

*Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Kurds of Turkey (An Update)*. September 1990.

"Southeast Turkey: Harsh New Decree," *News From Helsinki Watch*, June 1990.  
"Freedom of Expression," *News From Helsinki Watch*, February 1990.  
"Eight Cases of Torture," *News From Helsinki Watch*, July 1989.  
*Prison Conditions in Turkey*. August 1989.  
*Paying the Price: Freedom of Expression in Turkey*. March 1989.  
*Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Kurds of Turkey*. March 1988.  
*State of Flux: Human Rights in Turkey*. December 1987.  
*Freedom and Fear: Human Rights in Turkey*. March 1986.

*News From Helsinki Watch is a publication of Helsinki Watch, an independent organization created in 1979 to monitor domestic and international compliance with the human rights provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. The Chairman is Robert L. Bernstein; Vice Chairs, Jonathan Fanton and Alice Henkin; Executive Director, Jeri Laber; Deputy Director, Lois Whitman; Washington Representative, Catherine Cosman; Staff Counsel, Holly Cartner and Theodore Zang, Jr.; Orville Schell Intern, Robert Kushen; Intern, Jemima Stratford; Associates, Sarai Brachman, Mia Nitchun and Elisabeth Socolow.*

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

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