

TURKEY: CENSORSHIP BY ASSASSINATION:

Eleven Journalists and One Newspaper Distributor Murdered Since February

Helsinki Watch is deeply disturbed by the news of three more suspicious deaths in southeast Turkey: journalists Hatip Kapcak and Namik Taranci and newspaper distributor Halil Adanir were killed in separate incidents during the month of November. A total of eleven journalists and one newspaper distributor have been assassinated by unknown assailants since February of this year--a truly appalling situation in which death squads are carrying out censorship by assassination.

The recent murder victims were:

- **HATIP KAPCAK**, the Mardin reporter for a local newspaper, *Soz*, and for the weekly journal, *Gercek* (Fact), who was killed in an armed attack in the Mazidagi district of Mardin on November 18. Mr. Kapcak had been researching and reporting on a local organization that uses the name Hezbollah, which allegedly has ties to security forces. Mr. Kapcak had served six years in prison on political charges. After his release, he wrote for the daily, *Gunes*, and then for the daily, *Hurriyet*, before joining the *Soz* staff two months ago.
- **NAMIK TARANCI**, 37, the Diyarbakir representative of the weekly journal *Gercek*, who was shot and killed on November 20 on his way to work in Diyarbakir. He reportedly died on the spot with three bullets in his head after an attack by two assailants. Mr. Taranci had reportedly received a telephoned death threat the night before his murder. *Gercek* personnel had been threatened in connection with a story the journal had published on Hezbollah.
- **HALIL ADANIR**, a 32-year-old taxi driver, who was burned to death in his car in Batman Province on November 22. Mr. Adanir had reportedly been threatened several times to stop distributing *Ozgur Gundem* (Free Agenda), a pro-Kurdish periodical that began publication on May 30, 1992; four *Ozgur Gundem* reporters have been shot and killed since June and a fifth permanently paralyzed. Because of death threats, newspaper distribution companies in Batman Province stopped distributing *Ozgur Gundem* in early November; the journal has been distributed by volunteers. In Diyarbakir, twenty-two newspaper vendors have stopped selling the newspaper because of intensified threats.

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Helsinki Watch has previously reported on the killings of nine journalists since February.¹ All but one of the journalists had written for left-wing or pro-Kurdish journals; several had written about purported connections between a "counter-guerrilla" force or the Hezbollah and Turkish security forces. These murders suggest an on-going campaign to silence the dissident press in southeast Turkey.

The nine journalists killed earlier this year were:

- **HALIT GUNGEN, 22**, a reporter for the left-wing weekly journal, *2000'e Dogru* (Toward 2000), who was killed in the Diyarbakir office of *2000'e Dogru* at 8:00 p.m. on February 18, 1992. 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.
- **GENGIZ 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 Genmdarmerie 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.
- **IZZET KEZER**, a journalist for the mainstream daily, *Sabah*, was shot and killed by security forces in Cizre on March 23, during violence that followed the celebration of the Kurdish New Year, *Nevroz*. 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 who fired from an armored personnel carrier.
- 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

¹ See Helsinki Watch newsletter, "Turkey: Eight Journalists Killed Since February; A Ninth Critically Wounded," August 1992; and October 6 Helsinki Watch Press Release on the murder of Musa Anter, 74, a well-known Kurdish writer and journalist.

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.

- **HAFIZ AKDEMIR**, a reporter in the Diyarbakir office of *Ozgur Gundem*, was killed by a single bullet shot into the back of his head on June 8. Akdemir was shot at 8:00 a.m., fifty meters from his home in Diyarbakir. *Ozgur Gundem* began publication on May 30, 1992; reporters stated that they had received 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 the counter-guerrilla forces in the region.
- **CETIN ABABAY**, the Batman correspondent for the journal *Ozgur Halk* (Free Public), who was shot in the head at 7:30 p.m. on July 29 by three unidentified men while on his way home; he died in Diyarbakir University Hospital on July 30.
- **YAHYA ORHAN**, 30, the Gercus (Batman Province) correspondent for *Ozgur Gundem*, who was shot and killed by unknown assailants on July 31 at about 10:30 p.m. *Ozgur Gundem* reported that Mr. Orhan had been stopped on the street and threatened. According to his family, Mr. Orhan received a phone call at his home on July 31 in which he was told, "We have removed all journalists. Now it is your turn." Sounds of gunshots were then heard on the telephone.
- **HUSEYIN DENIZ**, 36, the Ceylanpinar (Urfa Province) correspondent for *Ozgur Gundem*, who was critically wounded by one bullet fired into his neck while on his way to work on August 9. He died on August 10. Mr. Deniz was also the regional correspondent for the daily, *Cumhuriyet*.
- **MUSA ANTER**, 74, a well-known Kurdish writer and journalist, who was shot and killed in Diyarbakir on September 20. Mr. Anter, who had published four books, was a columnist for *Ozgur Gundem*, *Yeni Ulke*, and the Kurdish newspaper, *Welat*. He was also the chairman of the board of the Mesopotamian Cultural Center in Istanbul. Mr. Anter was lured from his hotel on false pretenses and shot in the outskirts of Diyarbakir. A relative accompanying him was shot and wounded at the same time.

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The Turkish government has made no serious effort to investigate the murders and prosecute the killers of any of these journalists. The government's attitude toward the deaths has been most unsympathetic. On August 11, Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel said, "Those killed were not real journalists. They were militants in the guise of journalists. They kill each other."

Helsinki Watch is appalled by what appears to be a systematic campaign to silence the press about events in southeast Turkey, where a guerrilla war is being waged against security forces by the PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party). We urge the government to take immediate steps to investigate these twelve killings and to prosecute those responsible to the full extent of the law.

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This report was written by Lois Whitman.

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