

URGENT ACTION

HUNGER STRIKERS DENIED MEDICAL CARE

Hundreds are on hunger strike (some of them since 12 September) in prisons across Turkey. Lawyers told Amnesty International that prison authorities have denied many hunger strikers access to medical care, further threatening their health.

On 12 September, around 60 prisoners began a hunger strike in seven prisons across Turkey. The hunger strikes were initiated as a protest against the authorities' longstanding refusal to allow Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan to meet with his lawyers and to demand the provision of education in the Kurdish language. Since September, the number of hunger strikes has grown. According to the Ministry of Justice, 682 prisoners in 67 prisons had joined the hunger strike by 2 November.

Lawyers representing the hunger strikers told Amnesty International that prison doctors are routinely refusing to conduct medical examinations of the hunger strikers, including checking the prisoners' blood pressure. Lawyers also said that in some cases, hunger strikers are being denied access to vital vitamins taken to the prison by the lawyers. One prisoner on hunger strike in Sincan F-type prison was allegedly made to travel 36 hours for a court hearing, despite severe mobility problems and a doctor's report advising against the travel.

There are further concerns regarding reports that prisoners on hunger strike in Silivri and Şakran prisons have been placed in solitary confinement, and guards at Tekirdağ prison were ill-treating prisoners as a result of their participation in the hunger strike protests.

Please write immediately in Turkish or your own language:

- Reminding the authorities that hunger strikers are engaging in a peaceful form of protest and the Turkish authorities have an obligation to respect their right to freedom of expression, including their right to protest;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that the hunger strikers have adequate access to qualified medical professionals and any medical assessment, advice and any treatment that they will accept voluntarily based on this assessment, and to ensure that there is no unjustifiable restriction on hunger striking prisoners from receiving vitamins provided by their lawyers or family members;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that no punitive measures are taken against prisoners on hunger strike and the absolute prohibition of torture and other forms of ill-treatment is upheld; and to institute a prompt, thorough, impartial and effective investigations into allegations that prisoners in Silivri, Şakran and Tekirdağ prison were ill-treated or otherwise punished for their participation in the hunger strikes.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 DECEMBER 2012 TO:

Ministry of Justice

Sadullah Ergin

Adalet Bakanı

Adalet Bakanlığı

06659 Ankara, TURKEY

Fax: 011 90 312 417 71 13 (keep trying)

Email: sadullahergin@adalet.gov.tr

Salutation: Dear Minister

Parliamentary Commission on Human Rights

Ayhan Sefer Üstün

Commission Chairperson

TBMM İnsan Hakları İnceleme Komisyonu

Bakanlıklar, 06543 Ankara, TURKEY

Fax: 011 90 312 420 53 94

Email: insanhaklari@tbmm.gov.tr

Salutation: Dear Mr Üstü

Also send copies to:

Ambassador Namik Tan, Embassy of the Republic of Turkey

2525 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington DC 20008

Phone: 1 202 612 6700; 1 202 612 6701 | Fax: 1 202 612 6744 | Email: embassy.washingtondc@mfa.gov.tr | Twitter: @NamikTan

Please check with the AIUSA Urgent Action Office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In Turkey, prison hunger strikes have been repeatedly used as a method of protest. On 20 October 2000, more than 1,200 prisoners went on hunger strike; this was in protest at plans to move them to new prisons where they were to be housed in small cells, rather than dormitories that hold up to 60 prisoners. Prisoners were concerned that they would be at greater risk of assault or torture. When raids began on 19 December, some 200 were still on hunger strike and many of them were reportedly close to death. Turkish authorities intervened by force to end the hunger strikes with the operation they termed “return to life”. This operation led to the deaths of 30 prisoners and two soldiers during raids into 20 prisons. The Justice Minister reportedly stated that “at least 16 prisoners died, most of whom set themselves on fire”. He did not say how the other prisoners had died.

Hunger strikes continued in the following two years, claiming the lives of dozens of people – some of whom were not prisoners.

Amnesty International does not support hunger strikes, nor does it try to persuade hunger strikers to end such a protest. The organization opposes any punishment of hunger strikers and attempts to coerce them to end their hunger strike. Such measures violate their right to freedom of expression, and may also amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The authorities have an obligation to ensure prisoners’ right to life and health and must ensure that hunger strikers, like other prisoners, have adequate access to qualified health professionals and any medical assessment, advice and any treatment that they will accept voluntarily based on this assessment.

Name: Almost 700 prisoners on hunger strike in Turkey (m/f)

Issues: Hunger strike, Freedom of expression, Ill-treatment

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