

OPEN LETTER

TURKEY: Allegations of torture in Halfeti and Ankara

To:
Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
President of the Republic of Turkey
Mr. Binali Yıldırım
Prime Minister of Turkey
Mr. Bekir Bozdağ
Minister of Justice
Mr. Süleyman Soylu
Minister of Interior

Geneva, June 6, 2019

Your Excellencies,

It is with a sense of urgency that we convey our deep concern regarding recent allegations of torture and other ill-treatment happening across the country.

Between 18 and 21 May 2019, at least 51 persons, including three children, were detained in Halfeti, Urfa during police raids following armed clashes between security forces and the PKK during which a police officer as well as two alleged PKK members were killed. Two other police officers were injured.

Images circulated on the internet and eyewitnesses' testimonies show that during the arrest the detainees were pushed to the floor, handcuffed behind their backs and kept on the ground in stress position for hours. Police officers allegedly also kicked, punched, and hit them with the butt of their weapons. Reportedly, the beating continued in the anti-terrorism branch of Urfa security directorate, where the detainees were taken for interrogation. Some of them told their lawyers that the police threatened, blindfolded them and applied electricity to their bodies and genitals.

It was also reported that detainees were not allowed to be examined by a doctor without the presence of police officers and were denied access to legal counseling in the 24h after their arrests. When finally permitted to see a lawyer, the meeting was monitored by video surveillance. Lawyers acting on behalf of some of the detainees reported that many of them presented visible injuries, cuts and bruises to their bodies, legs and faces, but were terrified to speak out for fear of being exposed to even heavier torture.

At the time of writing, 38 people had been released. The remaining 13 are currently being held at the Şanlıurfa Hilvan T-type prison. 12 have been accused of being part of a terrorist organisation under Art. 7 of the anti-terrorism law, while one has been charged with insulting the President under Art. 299 of the Penal Code.

Moreover, on 27 May 2019, the Ankara Bar Association published information about a separate case of torture of dozens of dismissed diplomats held in custody at the Financial Crimes Investigation Bureau of the Ankara General Directorate of Security.

According to the report, which gathers the testimonies of six of the arrested individuals, the detainees were taken to interrogations during which they were subjected to psychological pressure and forced to sign confessions.

Five of these six people reported that they were also subjected to torture and ill-treatment. They told their lawyers that they were taken into a dark room, forced against a wall, handcuffed and forced to crawl on the ground, beaten, hit on their heads with a baton, stripped and threatened with sexual torture. They could not see the faces of their torturers in the dark, however one of the detainees said the men identified themselves as “a professional team from outside”. All five interviewees stated that they were examined by a doctor in the presence of police officers and that none of the medical reports mentioned any bruises or other signs of harm.

We would like to remind you that torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is prohibited under international and the domestic law of Turkey under any circumstances.

We therefore urge you to immediately take all necessary measures to ensure the safety and physical integrity of those still detained and to provide them with immediate independent medical care. We further call for prompt, independent and throughout investigations into all credible allegations of torture to ensure that all perpetrators are held accountable.

Your sincerely,

OMCT Europe’s Executive Council

OMCT Europe is an affiliate organisation of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), supporting its goals and objectives in Europe and Central Asia. Created in 1985, the OMCT is the main coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGO) fighting against torture, summary executions, enforced disappearances and all other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. With more than 200 affiliated organisations in its SOS-Torture Network, OMCT aims at accompanying, reinforcing and protecting anti-torture organisations in particular in erosive environments and provides a comprehensive system of support and protection for human rights defenders around the world.