

Human Rights Watch report on Turkey: a profile of a police state

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The kind of "justice" PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan can expect to receive is indicated by the report on human rights abuses in Turkey issued by Human Rights Watch as part of its *World Report 1999*. It states, in part: "Despite vigorous debates among state officials and in civil society on the 'rule of law,' laws continued to be applied arbitrarily, especially to restrict freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. The military, through powers that it was granted in the 1982 constitution, continued to exert influence over politics in a manner largely incompatible with the standards of democratic states. National political parties with pro-Islam, pro-Kurdish, or leftist tendencies and their local branches were harassed or simply shut down. There were violent assaults against human rights advocates, and offices of human rights groups were occasionally closed. Freedom of expression was often curtailed by abusive and arbitrary police action and through legal prosecution; non-violent demonstrators, writers and journalists were arrested; and several publications were closed down during the year. Although high-level state officials condemned the use of torture and promised reforms, torture in detention continued to be widespread, and those accused of torture received lenient or no punishment in several high-profile cases. Poor conditions prevailed in prisons. Amidst the persistence of severe human rights violations, a growing number of state officials, judges, and parliamentarians began to raise questions about the system that permits such severe abuse and an environment of impunity for the abusers."

Concerning the government's repression of the Kurds, the report states: "The pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HADEP) also faced intense surveillance and harassment by the security forces. In 1998, several HADEP offices, including its central office in Ankara, were raided, and party administrators and members

were detained and tortured. As of this writing, four party officials in detention await trial on charges of committing 'separatism through publication' and 'acting as the political branch of the PKK.' Four parliamentarians from the now-banned Democracy Party (DEP), a predecessor of HADEP before it was closed by the Supreme Constitutional Court in 1995, remained in prison. Three other former DEP parliamentarians were sentenced in 1998 on charges related to peaceful expression.

"Five provinces in southeastern Turkey--where an armed conflict between security forces and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has raged since 1984, resulting in the deaths of approximately 35,000 people, mostly civilians, and the forced depopulation of thousands of villages and hamlets--remained under a state of emergency. There was little change in six neighboring provinces--provinces that had previously been under emergency rule--because extraordinary measures continued to give state-appointed governors extended and restrictive powers. Despite government promises to compensate villagers, little effort has been made to facilitate the return of displaced persons to their homes in the southeast or to compensate them for the destruction and loss of their property."

On the suppression of the press and speech: "In 1998, however, even prominent and well-respected journalists and writers were prosecuted under the Anti-Terror law. Among the most troubling of these cases was the imprisonment of Professor Haluk Gerger (released after nine months), journalist Ragip Duran (sentenced to ten months of imprisonment), and lawyer and human rights activist Esber Yagmurdereli (sentenced to twenty years), all on free expression charges. In addition, on March 21, the chief of staff of the Turkish Armed Forces issued a statement that banned two liberal mainstream columnists, Mehmet Ali Birand (Sabah-

Show TV) and Yalcin Dogan (Milliyet, NTV), and one reporter, Muharrem Sarikaya (Hurriyet), from reporting any news about the military, entering military sites, or interviewing military personnel. The ban was lifted three days later with no explanation.

"Some three hundred issues of leftist, pro-Kurdish, or pro-Islamic publications were confiscated and numerous journals were closed down during the year. The government often invoked the Anti-Terror law to punish political expressions of Kurdish identity. Ulkede Gundem (Agenda in the Land), a newspaper advocating the recognition of Kurdish identity, was fined approximately 40 billion Turkish Lira (US \$12,000) during the year and closed by court order for 312 days. Issues of Hevi (Hope), a weekly newspaper in Kurdish known for its non-violent stance, were also confiscated forty-three times during the first nine months of the year. In March, the Diyarbakir State Security Court sentenced Sefik Beyaz, a former head of the Kurdish Institute, to one year of imprisonment and a fine of US \$100 for 'making separatist propaganda by playing Kurdish music' during his election campaign in 1995."



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