

Both the State and private Turkish citizens violate human rights

A lot of pertinent information in the 1990-92 report from the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey

By
Henrik Døcker, Journalist

Turkey belongs to the group of strange countries of this world where torture is widespread – and medical doctors are free to treat the victims at open rehabilitation centres. Turkey is also a country where both government and private organizations use torture.

Despite many problems, the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey is doing a great job. In 1992, 343 applied for treatment in the three centres – Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir. As many as 300 medical doctors and psychiatrists cared for them.

Fifty different torture methods

Since 1980 over a million people have been subjected to torture in Turkey. It is well known that the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) uses brutal measures in its fight for Kurdish self determination, and that the government has often declared a state of emergency in several provinces for that reason – facts which, however, must not influence the obligation of doctors to combat torture who ever use it.

The HRTF report enumerates about 50 different torture methods. 60% of the detainees were exposed to 4 types of torture, 36% to more than 4 types. Two-thirds indicated that the torture took place at a police station. The applicants for treatment complained mostly of psychological problems (63%); both physical and psychological complaints were made by 26%, compared with 10.9% of a total of psychological complaints. Torture was used in prisons to a lesser extent.

The commonest physical complaints were orthopaedic, due to long periods of torture. Gastrointestinal diseases due to psychosomatic disorders were the second commonest. Memory impairment, anxiety, and sleeping disorders were also frequent.

Few completed rehabilitation

Only 11.8% completed their rehabilitation. The Turkish centres consider this situation alarming. Several reasons prevented the victims from completing what was prepared for them: accommodation problems caused by the various kinds of obligation to the spouse, the job, and the army.

42% of the applicants who were in prison for more than a year had psychological and physical complaints, compared with 29% when the period was less than a year. Worries of being abandoned by their parents were often heard.

Since this HRTF report was published, the UN Committee Against Torture went public with the message that Turkey, despite numerous promises to abolish torture, still practices it systematically. The Turkish government has informed the UN that it is currently carrying out investigations regarding 457 people suspected of having used torture and mistreatment against prisoners in the period from 1 January to 30 August 1992. 450 people were duly charged.

Fear, intimidation, threats

The UN Committee emphasized that it should not be possible for an administrative body to abolish a judgment against a torturer passed by a court of justice. The Committee further stressed that the prohibition against torture is absolute.

Neither the UN Committee nor the Council of Europe Torture Prevention Committee, nor the HRTF for that matter, wants to gloss over the tremendous problems which face the Turkish government vis-à-vis the PKK. The HRTF regrets, however, that it has still not been possible to establish a centre for torture victims in the east Turkish town of Diyarbakir, centre of the Kurdish population.

Why? Because of the omnipresent atmosphere of fear, intimidation and threats to individuals, and the repression of any kind of associations, democratic civil organizations, vocational training institutions, labour unions, and political parties. The situation is tense; some people in Turkey even fear a virtual civil war.

As it must be acknowledged that torture is endemic, there is unfortunately little hope as yet for an eradication of this evil. Still, the fight for the victims continues, based on the goodwill and heavy work of numerous HRTF volunteers. The international society keeps an eye open on Turkey, trusting that the many reports of torture may some day have an effect.

Selected list of publications

received in the IRCT
International Documentation
Centre

State of war : political violence and counterinsurgency in Colombia / Human Rights Watch/Americas. – New York : Human Rights Watch, 1993. 1200. – 149 p. : app.

Børn i torturramte familier / Montgomery, Edith. – In: Psykologisk pædagogisk rådgivning ; vol. 31, no. 2, 1994:300. – p. 110-119.

Cameroon : the situation of torture survivors and their relatives in Cameroon: history and culture, politics and economy of Cameroon / Sama-Kwende, Gilles, [19940000]. – p. 2-5.

Incidence and prevalence of torture condition for torture rehabilitation work in Cameroon / Buma-Fodje, Jonas, [19940000]. – p. 6-9

Compensation suits as an instrument in the rehabilitation of tortured persons / Gordon, Neve ; Association of Israeli-Palestinian Physicians for Human Rights, [19940000]. – 14 p.

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