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Turkey: Kurdish girls raped and sexually abused in police custody

“A police officer asked me to ‘take off my trousers and socks.’ I again was scared and obeyed. I was standing. A police officer in uniform asked me to ‘bend.’ Afterwards he inserted something into my anus. It was something long and serrated. At that moment a bleeding started. I was totally bent. They were beating me with their sticks, saying ‘stand straight’.” After the anal rape the police officers reportedly told her “Even if you go to a doctor, you cannot prove anything.”

Nineteen-year-old Fatma Deniz Polattas

New evidence has emerged in the case of two Kurdish girls who were raped and sexually abused in police custody over several days earlier this year, demonstrating a continuing cycle of violence against young people in Turkish police stations, Amnesty International warned today.

Around midnight on 5 March 1999, a 16-year-old girl, N.C.S.*, was arrested in Iskenderun in the province of Hatay. Fatma Deniz Polattas, aged 19, was arrested on 8 March. Both were brought to the Anti-Terror Branch of Police Headquarters in Iskenderun where they were detained and tortured for seven and five days respectively.

In detention, the two girls were blindfolded, prevented from sleeping, going to the toilet, denied water and food, and forced to listen to loud music and drink spoiled milk. The police made them strip and stay naked, and told them to stand in exhausting positions for long periods of time. The girls were routinely insulted and threats were made against their parents.

N.C.S. was exposed to verbal and sexual harassment, continually beaten on her genitals, buttocks, breast, head, back and legs, forced to sit on a wet floor for a long time and roll naked in water, suspended from the arms and exposed to pressurized cold water.

A formal complaint was lodged against the police officers and subsequently in November an investigation has been opened. The two girls have been sentenced to long prison terms after being charged with membership of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and taking part in a violent demonstration against the arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. The two girls claim that their convictions are based on statements extracted under torture, yet they remain in prison pending the decision of the Appeal Court.

While in detention, the girls underwent several medical examinations, including virginity tests, by different doctors. None of the doctors reported signs of violence. A later report by the Turkish Medical Association describes medical symptoms which match the girls' testimonies of sexual torture. The Turkish Medical Association has stated that enforced gynaecological examinations are used simply to violate a woman's dignity and that they can be traumatic.

“Police officers are responsible for protecting people, not subjecting them to torture. The Turkish Government must take serious measures to ensure that children especially are not left at the mercy of security forces and that those responsible for torture in custody are brought to justice.” Amnesty International said.

The organization is also urging Turkey to continue its law reform to bring Turkish law fully in line with international standards, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Turkey ratified in 1995.

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* N.C.S. is used instead of the victim’s full name as she is under the age of 18.

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