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Fears of a cover-up in the Şemdinli bombing case

On 14 December the first hearing of the retrial of persons accused in connection with the November 2005 bombing of a bookshop in the south-eastern town of Şemdinli was held. The accused are two gendarmerie intelligence officers and a former Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) member turned informer. All three defendants have been released pending the next hearing. The two gendarmerie officers will now resume their duties. The events provide further justification to the belief that a military court will not provide an impartial and thorough investigation into the bombing and that there has been a cover-up.

Amnesty International has long held concerns that the investigation into the events surrounding the bombing in which one person was killed and others were injured has not been full and impartial. An investigation into the alleged involvement of local senior members of the gendarmerie and armed forces was not authorized by the Head of the Army. In limiting the investigation to two members of the security forces plus an informer, many questions went unanswered. Each of the men received sentences in excess of 39 years in prison for their part in the bombing when first convicted.

On 16 May 2007 the Supreme Court of Appeals overturned the convictions of the three men and recommended that the case be heard by a military court. Amnesty International was very concerned that the case was transferred to a military court. Amnesty International considers that when members of the security forces are suspected of serious violations of human rights, they should be tried in a civilian court.

With the decision of the military court to release the men and return the gendarmerie officers to their duties, more than two years after the bombing nobody has been held to account and the wider culpability of the security forces has not been effectively investigated. Amnesty International calls for a full and impartial investigation into the events surrounding the Şemdinli bombing to be carried out by an independent commission of enquiry and for suspects to be tried by a civilian court. A failure to do so would leave the then Justice Minister Cemil Çiçek's characterization of the current period in Turkey as "a period in which incidents do not remain in the dark" in serious doubt.

Amnesty International, International Secretariat, 1 Easton Street, WC1X 0DW, London, United Kingdom