

PUBLIC

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Turkey: Link between excavations of bodies and abductions of Kurds must be investigated

The Turkish government should immediately investigate the link between the recent alleged abductions and murders of Kurdish men by the Islamic armed organization Hizbullah and the excavation of 10 bodies in Istanbul yesterday and three more in Ankara today, Amnesty International said.

“At least nine Islamic Kurdish men have gone missing in recent months, revealing a disturbing pattern of abductions. These men were probably abducted for their religious and political beliefs,” Amnesty International said.

Mehmet Kanlıbıçak telephoned his family very late on 27 December to say that he would not be home that night. The following night he called Mehmet Mehmet Avcı and asked to see him. Mehmet Avcı left at once in his car, and later called his family and office to say that he would not be back for some days.

On the evening of 29 December two men called on İzzettin Yıldırım, and persuaded him to come with them by making him talk with Mehmet Mehmet Avcı on their mobile phone. İzzettin Yıldırım's flat had been opened, his room searched and documents taken away. İzzettin Yıldırım was president of the Islamic religious Zehra Foundation for Culture and Education in Istanbul.

Two Kurdish businessmen have gone missing in similar circumstances. Cihangir Gaffari Negis went missing on 29 November. The next day he called his business partner Ramazan Yasar to a meeting and neither of the men has been seen since. Ömer Çınar went missing after he left his home in Istanbul. Two of his brothers had previously been arrested by police, one of them tortured, the other one threatened.

Three other Kurdish men, Kadri Tuzer, Suayip Yetiş and Ahmet Atçın went missing between August and December.

Money was withdrawn from the credit card accounts of some of the abducted businessmen several times after they went missing and İzzettin Yıldırım's mobile phone was reportedly still in use, although he never answered it.

The Turkish authorities hold the Islamist armed organization Hizbullah responsible for the abduction of the Kurdish men. The abductions were said to be either an assault by Hizbullah on moderate Islamic Kurds or part of an internal conflict.

On 17 January, Istanbul police clashed with three people whom they believed to be responsible for the abductions. Reported leader of the armed wing of Hizbullah, Hüseyin Velioğlu, was killed in the incident. The Turkish authorities should provide information on the circumstances of his death.

Belongings of the nine Kurdish men were found in the house raided on 17 January. Police reportedly also found the identity card of a feminist Islamist called Konca Kuris who was forcibly abducted two years ago.

Police later arrested Cemal Tutsak, believed to be the military leader of Hizbullah, and Edip Gümüş, alleged to be responsible for the Western region of Turkey. Amnesty International believes the suspects are at risk of torture.

The organization is concerned that Hizbullah might be responsible for the abduction and killing of these and numerous other Kurds who went missing last year and strongly condemns human rights abuses by armed groups.

Amnesty International calls for the immediate release of any other people abducted and information on the whereabouts of the bodies of anyone killed. Amnesty International strongly urges both government authorities and non-state entities to ensure that all steps are taken to prevent such abuses from taking place in the future. The organization calls on the Turkish authorities to instigate prompt, independent and impartial investigations into the deaths with the results made public.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hizbullah was founded in 1980 and continued to be active in the Kurdish region, especially in Diyarbakır and Batman. In the late 1980s, Hizbullah has split into two wings which were later locked in a violent struggle against each other, other Islamic circles and especially the PKK.

In the 1990s, Hizbullah was thought to have been responsible for several killings of Kurds opposed to the government who had previously been harassed, detained, tortured and threatened by the security forces. In 1999, several moderate Islamic Kurds went missing. There have been reports that the armed Hizbullah wing is acting in collusion with parts of the Turkish security forces.

In early 1999, Turkish security forces reportedly obtained a comprehensive list of alleged adherents of Hizbullah. During 1999 the Turkish security forces carried out extensive raids and detained many Hizbullah members.

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*******For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>**