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Turkey: Helsinki Summit an opportunity to push for change in Turkey

This weekend's Helsinki Summit which will address Turkey's candidacy for the European Union (EU) is a prime opportunity for the EU to encourage Turkey to take serious steps to improve human rights, Amnesty International said today.

As set out in the Copenhagen Criteria for membership of the European Union (1993); "membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities."

"Turkey has taken some steps to improve human rights but has not gone far enough. Despite legal reforms in the right direction, freedom of expression continues to be stifled and torture is still a regular occurrence," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International welcomes the release of many journalists and writers under a new law on crimes committed via the press but is concerned that people who express opinions against the government orally are still imprisoned. The organization calls on the Turkish government to ensure freedom of expression is fully guaranteed in law and practice.

Amnesty International continues to receive reports of torture in Turkish police and gendarmerie stations. In March this year trade unionist Süleyman Yeter died while being held at Istanbul Headquarters Anti-terror branch. He was due to attend a trial hearing to identify police officers accused of torturing him and 14 others in 1997. An official investigation into his death has been opened but some of the police officers involved remain on duty.

Two Kurdish girls, who remain in prison on charges of being members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), were allegedly tortured in police custody over several days earlier this year, including rape and sexual abuse. An investigation has been opened but so far no one has been brought to justice.

Amnesty International is concerned that the possible execution of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan would break a 15-year *de facto* moratorium on executions which could pave the way for at least 47 other executions.

Amnesty International is calling on the EU to scrutinize human rights in Turkey, to thoroughly assess legal reforms and practice, and to take this opportunity to encourage a genuine move forward on all aspects of human rights in Turkey.

Note: Amnesty International takes no position on Turkey's candidate status or future membership of the EU. ENDS.../

****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>**