

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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Disturbing Abuse During Security Operations

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(Istanbul) [Turkish](#) police have engaged in severe ill-treatment and abuse of detainees while responding to perceived security threats in the southeastern part of the country, Human Rights Watch said today.

Human Rights Watch documented three cases in which men were severely beaten, kicked, forced to remain in kneeling positions for hours, and threatened with torture and execution. In another case, police detained a boy who had a severe gunshot wound and denied him the medical treatment he needed.

Its deeply worrying that police in Turkey's southeast seem to be returning to abusive tactics in response to the security threats, said [Benjamin Ward](#), Europe and Central Asia division deputy director at Human Rights Watch. The authorities should urgently investigate and prosecute those responsible, and ensure that people in custody are protected from ill-treatment and have prompt access to proper medical treatment.

Human Rights Watch made repeated efforts to discuss these cases with both the governor of Mardin province and the district governor of Silopi, but has received no response.

[Torture and extrajudicial killings](#) were serious problems in the predominantly Kurdish southeast during the height of the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in the 1990s. Despite legal reforms since 2005 aimed at improving safeguards against ill-treatment and legal representation for those in detention, Human Rights Watch has repeatedly documented police violence and the lack of [accountability](#) for police officers committing such abuses.

Renewed conflict between Turkish security forces and Kurdish militia has risen to worrying levels. The Turkish government, in a [response](#) to attacks attributed to the extremist group Islamic State (also known as ISIS) and the PKK near the border with Syria, has conducted massive counterterrorism raids across the country, blocking websites, and banning and dispersing protests.

The three men who described abuse in police custody were detained during an August 7, 2015 security operation in the predominantly Kurdish town of Silopi, near the Iraqi Kurdistan border, where members of the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H), the youth wing of the PKK, had dug trenches and erected barricades to keep the police from entering the Baak neighborhood. According to the Human Rights Association (Insan Haklar Dernei, IHD), 4 people were killed in the ensuing clashes between Kurdish militants and the police, including 1 policeman, while 15 others, including at least 1 child, were wounded by gunfire.

The three men were taken into police custody in front of a hospital on suspicion of being PKK members after they drove family members and neighbors there for treatment from injuries during the armed clashes. Six other men were also arrested at the hospital that day. The three men interviewed said they were beaten during their arrest, and on the way to and at the police station, with rifle butts, fire extinguishers, chains, batons, and brass knuckles, and threatened with further abuse and death.

The three men told Human Rights Watch that police refused to take them to a hospital for treatment of their injuries. They said that a doctor was brought to the police station, but he did not examine them and instead signed a pre-drafted statement that made no mention of the ill-treatment of the detainees.

All of the nine men have since been released, and a criminal investigation has been opened against them.

In another case, police denied adequate medical treatment to a seriously wounded 17-year-old boy who was taken into police custody in the town of Cizre during armed clashes between security forces and the YDG-H on July 30. The Cizre district governor told Human

Rights Watch that the boy was shot while fighting alongside the YDG-H. His mother denied it and said he was shot in both cheeks while on the balcony of the family home.

Relatives took him to the hospital, where police detained him. His mother said the police took him to another hospital in Elaz, 400 kilometers away, and prevented her from accompanying him. The doctor in Elaz certified him fit for interrogation even though he could not speak, said his lawyer, who had a copy of the medical report.

His lawyer said that he was still in severe pain and unable to speak when he was interrogated first by a prosecutor and later in the presence of a judge, who ordered his arrest. The lawyer said that the boy lost 90 percent of his eyesight in his left eye due to the lack of treatment and that doctors refused to perform surgery, though he was unaware of the reasons.

The boy is currently in pretrial detention in the adult division of rnak prison, on suspicion of being a member of the YDG-H. His lawyer said that he is receiving medical treatment, but that it is inadequate.

Turkey is party to both the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which prohibit inhuman and degrading treatment and torture. Turkey has strict obligations to protect the rights to life, bodily integrity, and security, and as part of those obligations, medical treatment must be provided promptly to anyone who is injured when arrested.

In a previous case, the European Court of Human Rights found Turkey guilty of violating its obligations when it failed to provide prompt and appropriate medical treatment to a person who had been detained allegedly on suspicion of PKK membership, and who had visible injuries to his head and evident difficulties in walking and talking.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to which Turkey is a party, as well as the ICCPR, require that children be held separate from adults in detention, and the CRC specifies that every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.

The Turkish authorities should ensure that its policing and security operations comply fully with human rights law, that police officers who violate fundamental rights and freedoms are held accountable, and that acts of torture and ill-treatment are investigated and prosecuted, Human Rights Watch said.

No one should be denied access to proper medical treatment, no matter the accusations against them, Ward said. The Turkish authorities should make sure that people in police custody and prison are getting the medical care they need.

For detailed accounts from the detainees, please see below.

One of the men arrested in Silopi on August 7 said:

We were at home when we heard the sounds of gunfire outside. When I looked outside, I saw that [name withheld] was injured, so I took [that person] to the hospital. When we got to the hospital [the police] surrounded us, and forced us to lie face down on the ground. They started to beat us; they beat even those who were injured. Then they put us into a police bus; they just threw all of us on top of each other. They called us calans dogs and started to beat us very badly. We were taken to the police station.

I was dragged along the corridor of the station by my t-shirt, then they lined us up in the corridor on our knees, facing the wall. We had to stay like this for about six hours. During that time they continued to beat us with their rifles, a fire extinguisher, and other objects. I lost consciousness at some point. [After I started to come round] they said: If that dog is dead, lets throw [his body] back into the neighborhood. I screamed and swore that I was innocent, that I did not do anything, but they did not listen. But they said: You are not a Muslim, stop swearing on the Koran and in Gods name.

The second man said:

I was taking an injured neighbor to the hospital. That was around 7 a.m. and I had been on my way to work then, but I saw this injured [man] and wanted to help. Isnt that my duty as a human being? When we drove up to the gate of the emergency entrance, several policemen stopped us at gunpoint, and threatened us. They made us get out of the car.

We had to lie down on the ground and they started insulting us. They also beat us, for at least 10 minutes, then they put us into a [police vehicle] and drove us to the police station. When we arrived there, all the policemen at the station tried to hit us, even the officer in the security booth came running out to join the beating. I could feel that my ribs were broken. They used their rifles and their rifle butts to hit us. They called us Jews and Armenians, they swore at us, they were like mad. They took us down in the basement of the police station, and every time an officer came down he beat us. One officer forced the barrel of his rifle into my mouth and told me to recite the Shahada [the Muslim profession of faith]. He broke one of my teeth.

The third man said:

I was at home when I heard the sound of gunfire and explosion outside. We were very afraid. Then [someone] got hit by a bullet, and I wanted to take [that person] to the hospital. We were taken into custody at the hospital entrance and taken to the police station. We were beaten again and again. They threatened to use pliers to pull out our teeth. They said in front of us: Lets get some cables, lets use electricity on them.

While we were in the prison cell in the police station, we did not get any water or food. In the end we drank the water from the toilet in the cell, because we were thirsty. We were in police custody from 7 a.m. to midnight. They brought in a doctor, just a regular family doctor, and I think he was afraid to ask questions or really examine us and ask what had happened. They forced him to just sign some paper pretending that we were all fine.

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