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Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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BQ 293 – No. 07/2014

Malatya (Turkey): Murderers set free from prison

(Bonn, 13.03.2014) Last week the five primary suspects accused of the April 2007 murders in Malatya were set free from prison. A recent change in the law provides for a maximum of five years in prison prior to a verdict. Since the murders in Malatya now date back nearly seven years, the perpetrators were set free on this legal technicality. This is exactly what was feared a week ago, especially by the survivors of the murders.

As part of the legislative changes all special courts were abolished. According to Umut Sahin, Secretary General of the Protestant Churches in Turkey, it is still unclear what will happen with the Malatya murder trial. In principle it would still be possible that the former judge of the special court would be appointed as judge of a normal court, who could bring the trial to a timely conclusion. That would be very desirable, especially from the perspective of the bereaved. At the same time, as one of the survivors told BQ, some fear that the chance that the court will really do something "is almost zero." One can doubt whether the responsible party "is really interested in a proper investigation and trial leading to an honest conclusion."

At present the five suspects are in a type of electronic house arrest, which is causing grave concern among the members of the Turkish Protestant churches who wonder if this will lead to more martyrs.

Press release of the Association of Protestant Churches (Turkey):

This release has created great sorrow and the impression that belief in justice has been destroyed.

18 April 2007 has become a very difficult day for Protestant Christians living in Turkey. That day, Necati Aydın and Uğur Yüksel, and German citizen Tilman Geske, who all worked at the Zirve Publishing House, were subjected to brutal torture, and, in the end, were savagely murdered by five youths who cut their throats.

A legal change, affecting the release of all suspects, who have spent more than five years in detention, has become the reason for this horrific decision. The five murder suspects, who have been imprisoned for seven years in the wake of the Zirve Publishing House massacre on 18 April 2007, were set free last night as a result of this change. In the prosecutor's written opinion given at the last hearing, it was requested that the murder suspects be sentenced to four consecutive life sentences. Throughout the hearings, the murder suspects have repeatedly threatened the



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families of the deceased, activists of non-governmental organizations, and members of the press and lawyers. Under such conditions, those being threatened began to experience great concern.

This release has created great sorrow among Christians, and the impression that belief in justice has been destroyed.

In this case, whose conclusion not only the Turkish public but also the entire world has awaited with great patience for seven years, the self-sacrificing labors of lawyers and non-governmental organizations since the beginning of the hearings to obtain satisfaction of justice have been reduced to zero in an instant. With these releases, the case has suffered a terrible blow. Not only Christians, all Turkish citizens who have a conscience were expecting the case to end with justice. At this time, the conscience of all Turkey has been wounded. The murder suspects are now in society, "hands and arms free." Who will bear the moral responsibility for this horrific decision? Even more important, who will pay the heavy price of any (very probable!) new activities by these massacre suspects?

As Turkish Christians, we reacted on this release decision with great pain. A delay of justice for seven years possibly can be endured, but what conscience can endure the utter destruction of justice? The personal safety of ourselves and our families as Christian citizens is under great threat, and we follow these developments in deep horror.

We call the government of the Turkish Republic, and all organs of justice, to duty without delay against these threats and dangers. We look for intervention in the shortest possible time against this insensitive and unjust decision.

During these worrisome days that we are living in our country, our cry is that justice might find its place. To the press and the public, we offer our untiring struggle for justice to be established.

Links and Downloads:

- Turkish original of the press release: <http://haber.sat7turk.com/protestan-kiliseler-bu-tahliye-hiristiyanlar-arasinda-buyuk-bir-uzuntu-ve-adalete-inancin-yitirilmesi-etkisi-yaratmistir>
- Publication of the press release in newspaper *Radikal*: http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/protestan_kiliseler_derneginden_zirve_tahliyelerine_tepki-1180179

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