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Turkey: Authorities must allow residents of Cizre access to basic needs during prolonged curfew

Amnesty International calls on the Turkish authorities to ensure that residents of Cizre, in Şırnak province, who have been confined to their homes by a round-the-clock curfew since 4 September, are immediately given access to food and other necessities, including medical care. They must also allow observers to enter the city.

The curfew, a total ban on residents leaving their houses, has been accompanied by the cutting of mobile phone signals, the blocking of roads, preventing anyone from entering or leaving the city, and reported cuts to water and electricity. Outside observers have been banned from entering the city, which has a population of over 100,000 people. Amnesty International is extremely concerned regarding the impact of the curfew and associated security measures on the people of Cizre, as it enters the eighth day.

Reports from residents in the city, who at times have been able to communicate via fixed line phone lines and broadband internet communications, indicate that some residents have run out of drinking water and food, and are unable to access medical care, including emergency treatment. Reports by lawyers and human rights defenders, who have been in contact with people in the city, also indicate that residents including children and elderly people have been killed and injured by live ammunition as armed clashes in the city continue between the Turkish security forces and the Revolutionary Patriotic Youth Movement (YDG-H) the youth wing of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Amnesty International approached the Turkish authorities for comment but received no response.

The Governor of Şırnak province announced on 4 September that the curfew would come into force on that day until further notice in order to enable “the capture of members of the separatist terrorist organization [PKK] and to protect the security of the people and their property”, citing the powers of the Governor under the Provincial Administration Law.

A resident in the city told Amnesty International that heavy clashes between the YDG-H and security forces had taken place day and night during the duration of the curfew, involving heavy weapons including police use of mortars and heavy machine guns. The resident told Amnesty International that ambulances have not been able to access wounded people in the areas where clashes are taking place and that in other instances police officers have denied wounded people access to medical care.

The Minister of the Interior stated yesterday that one “citizen” and seven “terrorists” had died. He also stated that 10 members of the PKK had been detained and that weapons and ammunition had been recovered. Reports from human rights defenders indicate that more than 10 unarmed residents have been killed. Amnesty International is not able at this time to verify the number of deaths nor the circumstances in which they occurred. During research carried out in Cizre in August, Amnesty International received consistent and credible accounts of reckless use of weapons by both the police and YDG-H resulting in deaths and injuries of residents uninvolved in armed violence. During the month following the escalation in violence between the PKK and the Turkish security forces following

20 July, three Cizre residents were killed in disputed circumstances. Two were shot by the police, while a third died in an explosion caused by “mine”, an improvised explosive device likely to have been planted by the YDG-H.

Turkey has an obligation to uphold the right to freedom of movement. While this right may be subject to certain limitations, any restriction must be provided by law, imposed for a legitimate purpose and be necessary and proportionate. Restoring public order can serve as a legitimate reason for restricting movement. However, an indefinite, round-the-clock curfew is a disproportionate restriction, as is blocking all access to the city. Other security measures also must meet the necessity and proportionality test to be lawful. Cutting electricity, water and communications to the entire population of Cizre are disproportionate measures.

Amnesty International calls on the Turkish authorities to ensure residents have sufficient time each day to leave their homes and get food and other supplies and to have access to urgent medical care at all times. Further, authorities should restore access to water and electricity.

Amnesty International also calls for outside observers to be allowed into Cizre to monitor and report on the situation, for the authorities to ensure that any use of firearms is in line with international human rights standards, which require that lethal force not be used except in self-defence or defence of others against imminent threat of death or serious injury. Further, the organization reminds the authorities of Turkey’s obligation to ensure prompt, effective, independent and impartial investigation of all deaths at the hands of police and security forces.

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