



4.18.2011

TURKEY Malatya murder trial continues on fourth anniversary of deaths

Today marks the fourth anniversary of the murders of Necati Aydın, Ugur Yuksel and Tillman Geske, employees of the Zirve Publishing House in Malatya, eastern Turkey. The three members of the Malatya Kurtulus Church were tortured and killed by a group of five young Muslims in the office of the Christian publishing company on April 18, 2007.

The trial of the five alleged murderers began on November 22, 2007 at the Third Criminal Court in Malatya, and to date at least 27 witnesses have appeared in court over the course of 30 hearings. The five men were caught trying to escape from the scene of the crime. However, the trial has been prolonged due to the prosecutors' desire to prove the killings were commissioned by high-level clandestine powers.

A step in this direction was taken last month, when twenty people were detained in connection with both the Malatya murders and the ongoing 'Ergenekon' case. Ergenekon is an alleged high-level conspiracy to destabilize the Turkish government through acts of terror, including the targeting of minority communities, as outlined in the organization's "Cage Action Plan".

Those recently detained include a university theology lecturer, a non-commissioned officer from the Siirt Provincial Gendarmerie Command, and the retired colonel who commanded Malatya's Provincial Gendarmerie Brigade at the time of the murders.

Friends and family of the victims, who have long advocated a more in depth examination of these murders, have expressed satisfaction with recent developments, and the hope that the Malatya trial will soon be officially merged with the Ergenekon case. However, the timing of the recent removal from the Ergenekon investigation of Zekeriya Öz, the chief prosecutor who ordered the recent arrests, has raised some anxieties. The next Malatya hearing is scheduled for 29 April.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "On the anniversary of their deaths, we remember the lives of Necati, Ugur and Tilman, and offer up prayers once more for their families and friends. It is encouraging to see that links between the Malatya case and Ergenekon are being made, and we urge the Turkish judiciary to scrupulously continue these investigations so as to bring to light all the hidden facets of this case. It is crucial that all who were involved in the murders at any level are brought to justice, in order to send a clear message that attacks against Turkey's minority communities will not be tolerated."