

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Index: EUR 44/008/2012
30 May 2012

Turkish Prime Minister's staunch opposition to abortion undermines human rights

Amnesty International is deeply concerned by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's announcement of forthcoming legislation on abortion which, if passed, would further restrict access to needed health care for women and girls in contravention of their human rights. At a recent event the Prime Minister made comments comparing abortion to murder and calling on the Minister of Health to impose new, more restrictive abortion laws in Turkey.

Abortion has been legal in Turkey since 1983, allowing women to terminate a pregnancy during the first 10 weeks of gestation. Thereafter, a legal abortion is permitted only to save the life or health of the pregnant woman and in cases of foetal impairment.

Restrictions on access to abortion go against medical evidence and place the lives and health of women in Turkey at risk by forcing many who need abortions to seek illegal and therefore generally unsafe procedures. The World Health Organization has noted that, "the more restrictive legislation on abortion [is], the more likely abortion [is] to be unsafe and to result in death."

The restriction of abortion access and the denial of safe and legal abortion services also violates women's human rights as protected in numerous binding international human rights treaties. Turkey is party to several international human rights treaties — such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women—protecting a range of human rights that are intrinsically linked to women's ability to decide if, when, with whom, and how often to become mothers. The United Nations expert bodies authorised by states to interpret these treaties have repeatedly called for women and adolescent girls to have access to a full range of sexual and reproductive health services, including, where needed, abortion.

Amnesty International calls on the Turkish government to ensure that women's human rights are fully protected and that no further measures are put in place restricting women's access to safe and legal abortion services.

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