

Turkey's Human Rights Record Is Taken to Task

By Nora Boustany

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Inge Genefke, a Danish neurologist and veteran human rights activist, testified on Monday before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus and used the occasion to criticize the Turkish government for not doing more to stop torture in its country.

In her testimony, she said the Turkish government had not shown the political will to enforce new laws against torture. Despite official claims that the use of torture had declined or stopped in Turkey, Genefke said, the number of victims treated by the independent Human Rights Foundation of Turkey has not decreased. The foundation reported 924 cases in 2003. Genefke's remarks came two days before the scheduled release of the State Department's annual human rights report.

"Substantial improvements have been made in Turkish legislation, yet no improvement has been made in the prevention of torture," Genefke said in a telephone interview yesterday. Genefke, 65, represents the International Rehabilitation Council of Torture Victims. That nonprofit organization is affiliated with the Research and Rehabilitation Center for Torture, which Genefke founded in 1985. Based in Copenhagen, the organization supports rehabilitation by health organizations around the world. She said the group has the largest international documentation center on torture.

Genefke mentioned a case in which nine members of the executive committee of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey were being tried for their activities in support of hunger strikers. "What is astonishing and grotesque is that they are punishing the doctors and not the police," Genefke said. "I would have some hope if there were maybe five or six cases against policemen out of the hundreds involved."

"Torture is the worst and most effective instrument against democracy. Three billion people live in countries where governments condone torture, and Turkey is one of them," she said.

She also called on the United States to influence other countries on the issue. "The United States as a superpower has the special ethical duty to help eliminate torture," she said.