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Turkey: Ali Ismail Korkmaz convictions fail to bring justice

Today a Turkish court found that police officers in plain clothes and civilians together beat Gezi Park protestor Ali Ismail Korkmaz, in an unprovoked attack, resulting in his death. It is the second conviction for the police killing of a protestor during the protests that swept Turkey during summer 2013. Hundreds more complaints into police violence look increasing unlikely even to come to court.

Two police officers, Mevlüt Saldoğan and Yalçın Akbulut were convicted for lesser offence of deliberate wounding causing the death of 19 year-old Ali Ismail Korkmaz and sentenced to 10 years, 10 months and 10 years after reductions, respectively, rather than the charge of deliberate killing under which Mevlüt Saldoğan had been prosecuted, which carries a life sentence.

During the trial, a video was shown to the court of the police officers and civilians beating Ali Ismail Korkmaz. Police officer Mevlüt Saldoğan is seen in the video repeatedly kicking him in the head as he lay motionless on the ground after the attack.

Two other police officers who were part of the group attacking demonstrators but were not shown beating Ali Ismail Korkmaz were acquitted of all charges due to "lack of evidence".

Three civilians were convicted of taking part in the attack and sentenced to six years, eight months after reductions, A fourth civilian was sentenced to three years, four months for assisting the attack and released from prison due to time served on remand.

The investigation into the killing of Ali Ismail Korkmaz was subject to numerous setbacks including the tampering with CCTV evidence showing the scene of the attack. Had it not been for the perseverance of Ali Ismail Korkmaz family, their lawyers and journalists uncovering evidence that the case would likely not have even come to court. Ali Ismail Korkmaz's family expressed their deep disappointment with the verdict in a statement delivered outside the courtroom.

Two further cases where there is strong evidence that police use of force resulted in deaths at Gezi Park protests remain unresolved. The trial in the case of Abdullah Cömert who was hit by a tear gas canister in Antakya continues. According to witnesses, 15 year-old Berkin Elvan, who died after 269 days in a coma, was also hit by a tear gas canister fired by police. However, prosecutors in Istanbul have failed to identify the law enforcement officers responsible for firing tear gas at the scene. Hundreds of others who were injured by law enforcement officers are still awaiting justice.

Overall, the judicial machinery has been ineffective in bringing police abuses to justice in the face of obstructiveness and failure to provide evidence by law enforcement agencies. The Turkish authorities must bring swift and just conclusion to the many hundreds of complaints that are still pending and bring all those responsible for human rights abuses to justice.

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