
national issue The missing people of Turkey have become a national issue

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The missing people of Turkey have become a national issue. The Financial Times, 11 May 1996. In March last year Hasan Ocak a Kurdish shopkeeper living in Istanbul vanished during a security crackdown. Relatives found his body nearly two months later buried in an indigents' cemetery. Although two witnesses say they saw him in an Istanbul detention centre the government denies he was ever held. The Ocak case rapidly became a cause célèbre. Turkey's Human Rights Association declared May 17, the day on which his body was found to be the national day of the disappeared. Some like Ocak are beaten and tortured to death, then interred as indigents. Until now, courts accepted the police and the security's denials without question. The Ocak affair and the disappearance in January of Metin Goktepe, a journalist has led the media and courts to question the security forces' role. Even Adnan Ekmen, the government's human rights minister, traditionally a figure of only symbolic importance, admitted that what is clear is that Metin was taken into custody and he was killed in custody. Pressure from the media, human rights organisations and from overseas forced prosecutors to begin legal proceedings against more than 20 police officers suspected of involvement in his death. Turkish security are applying the same methods as their Latin American counterparts of the 1970s, who first used disappearance to silence political opposition. It seems fitting then, that Turkey's human rights movement should use the same approach as Latin American campaigners, like Argentina's mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. They have gathered every Thursday in front of the presidential palace in Buenos Aires for 20 years to demand the government account for the 16,000 people abducted and presumed murdered by the 1976-83 military regime. Like the friends and relatives of Turkey's disappeared gather every Saturday on Istiklal Caddesi, crowded pedestrian precinct, to demand the release of the missing. Turkey is under increasing international pressure to improve its human rights record. Hanife

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