

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.

Swede Returns to Service

Laila Freivalds, a veteran Swedish official, thought she had retired from government service in September 2000, after nine years as Sweden's minister of justice. She planned to focus on her leisure activities in support of the opera and theater. She said her family was delighted with the change after her years of work as a lawyer, judge and public official.

But after Foreign Minister **Anna Lindh** was killed by an assailant in Stockholm last September, Prime Minister **Goran Persson** asked Freivalds to return to the cabinet.

She said it was a difficult choice. Sweden was in shock, and Freivalds decided to accept the prime minister's request to replace Lindh as foreign minister. "I understood that Anna Lindh was very much appreciated and trusted," Freivalds, 62, said in an interview last week. "It would not have been easy for anyone to come after her. Any young man or woman would have been compared to her. I'm older and no one would choose to compare us" in terms of experience, Freivalds said.

"It was a very tough decision to take that job, but now I enjoy it and I will use it to continue something that I am proud of . . . which is that this small country up in the north remains so engaged with foreign affairs," Freivalds said. "Our prime minister, so many nongovernmental organizations and people are involved, and I think that is admirable," she said over a meal of salmon and meatballs at the residence of Swedish Ambassador **Jan Eliasson**.

Freivalds spoke at a diplomatic dinner in Washington, following meetings with Secretary of State **Colin L. Powell** and with **Madeleine K. Albright**, former secretary of state and now chairman of the National Democratic Institute. Freivalds said she also met with **President Bush's** national security adviser, **Condoleeza Rice**, before heading to New York for talks with U.N. Secretary General **Kofi Annan**.

Freivalds was born in Riga, Latvia, which she said has always given her "more feeling for the world outside Sweden. She said she asked her American hosts to support Scandinavian and Baltic countries in their efforts to deepen ties with Russia.

"This is a big country that has lost its position in world politics, but it is a close neighbor and we can benefit from closer cooperation with it," she said. "Russia has no tradition of democracy, and you cannot expect it to change from one year to another."

She said she also asked U.S. officials to develop a free market in the Mediterranean region and to work on dialogue between European and Middle Eastern countries. "We will benefit by having a connection and common interests in the future," she said.

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