Suspect Denies Plan to Kill Christian Publisher's Staff

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[] The first of five young Turkish Muslims on trial for torturing and killing three Christians who worked at an evangelical publishing house in Turkey recently took the witness stand, vigorously denying that the group had planned to kill the evangelicals, Compass Direct News reported.
In the chilling testimony of the final hours of Necati Aydin, Ugur Yuksel and Tilmann Geske, accused killer Hamit Ceker told the Third Criminal Court in the southeastern Turkish province of Malatya on Jan. 14 that during the savage attack against the three at Zirve Publishing Company's office last April 18, he saw leading suspect Emre Gunaydin slit the throats of two of the Christians.

Although Ceker testified that they had brought along guns, rope, knives, plastic gloves and an Islamic protective prayer inscription, he insisted the purpose of the operation was to seize incriminating evidence against the Christians, not to kill them, Compass reported. The court is scheduled to resume interrogation of the remaining four suspects Feb. 25.

In a demonstration three years ago, local protesters had claimed Zirve's publishing and distribution activities constituted “proselytism” among Muslims and that the company should be closed down, Compass reported.

In a TV interview the day after the massacre, one of the men's wives forgave her husband's killers, following the example of Christ who pardoned His murderers and citing Jesus' prayer:

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Zirve reopened last May after being sealed off for more than a month for the police investigation, the *Turkish Daily News* reported.