

Trial of Christian Publisher's Slain Workers Postponed

Plaintiff lawyers demand judges be replaced, accusing them of bias and obstructing justice.



[] The trial of a group of Muslims accused of murdering three employees of a Christian publishing house in Turkey has been continually delayed.

Lawyers representing the families of the Christians slain last year recently demanded that the three-member bench of judges hearing the case be replaced, accusing them of being biased, Compass Direct News said.

On April 18, 2007, five young Turkish Muslims entered the Malatya offices of Zirve Publishing and tortured and then slit the throats of Necati Aydin and Ugur Yuksel, both Turkish Christians who had converted from Islam, and German Christian Tilmann Geske. Compass, which covers persecution of Christians, ranked the savage attack among its top 10 stories of 2007.

Turkish press reported that four of the five young men arrested, all 19 to 20 years of age, admitted during initial interrogations that they were motivated by both "nationalist and religious feelings" as well as protecting Islam from Christian missionaries.

In a demonstration against the Christian publisher more than two years ago, local protesters claimed its publishing and distribution activities constituted "proselytism" among Muslims and 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 re-opened last May after being sealed off for more than a month for the police investigation, the Turkish Daily News reported.

Addressing the Malatya Third Criminal Court in late February, plaintiff lawyer Özkan Yücel Soylu declared that the “impartiality and independence” of the court was in jeopardy, as the judges were obstructing justice by withholding evidence and refusing to record the high-profile murder case, Compass reported.

During the court proceeding, Soylu objected to the court’s refusal to grant access to the killers’ computer records, photographs from the autopsies and crime scene and security camera films from one suspect’s hospital room, Compass reported.

However, the fourth trial hearing against the Turks scheduled for March was postponed until April 14 after court clerks mysteriously failed to file the plaintiff lawyers’ request to replace the judges, Compass reported.

Meanwhile, the murder of a Christian bookseller has been featured in a controversial Turkish TV series.

In one episode of The Valley of the Wolves, a young man—posing as a panhandler—enters a Christian bookstore, approaches a clerk or owner and holds out a coin, Asia News reported. The young man then fires a gun, instantly killing the bookstore worker.

The show continues with the discovery of a printing press that publishes gospel materials with a cover identical to the books commonly provided to Christians who attend churches in Turkey, Asia News reported.—**Eric Tiansay for Christian Retailing**