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ECHR fines Turkey for Jehovah's Witnesses forced to do military service

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The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has fined Turkey 57,650 euros for prosecuting and convicting four Jehovah's Witnesses who refused compulsory military service. DAILY NEWS Photo

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has fined Turkey 57,650 euros for prosecuting and convicting four Jehovah's Witnesses who refused compulsory military service, according to a statement from the Court on June 3.

Çağlar Buldu, Barış Görmez, Ersin Ölgün and Nevzat Umdu also complained about the treatment they sustained during the proceedings in question.

The applicants argued that their criminal convictions entailed a violation of freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Görmez also complained that he had had to appear, as a civilian, before a court made up exclusively of military personnel.

The ECHR ordered Turkey to pay Buldu 12,000 euros, Görmez 15,000 euros, Ölgün 7,000 euros and Umdu 5,000 euros for non-pecuniary damage, in addition to a sum of 18,650 for costs and expenses.

In a separate case, six relatives of a conscript, Ferit Aktepe, who committed suicide during service, also applied to the ECHR, saying he showed signs of anxiety and was taking drugs at the time.

Aktepe was found fit for service by doctors and had not informed the authorities of any particular problems, but his weapon was taken from him as a safety measure.

On March 1, 2005 he was found to have been lethally wounded by a weapon belonging to one of the other conscripts.

The military authorities should have taken appropriate measures in order to protect him from physical and mental injury, his relatives said, also complaining that the related investigation was insufficient.

The ECHR ruled that 1,365 euros of just satisfaction to the six applicants jointly for pecuniary damage, 9,000 euros to Aktepe's father and mother jointly, 6,500 euros to his two brothers jointly and 4,500 euros to his grandfather and grandmother jointly for non-pecuniary damage, in addition to 12,000 euros in sum for costs and expenses.

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