



Private Secretary No 10

COURT CASES AGAINST BRITISH CHRISTIANS IN TURKEY

1. On 21 March, the Turkish police arrested several foreigners, including two British nationals, who were members of an Evangelical Christian group in Ankara. The British subjects, named Lidstone and Cornelius, who are a teacher and a student, were subsequently released, as were the two Americans, two Koreans, a Swede, a German and a Turk who were also members of the group. They were, however, charged on 1 April (ironically enough Good Friday) under an article of the Turkish Penal Code which provides 1-5 years imprisonment for "propaganda" exploiting religion to procure advantage, whether political or personal. Those charged remain at liberty pending the hearing of the case, for which no date has been set. British press representatives in Ankara are keenly interested in the story.
2. The provisions of the Turkish Penal Code against proselytizing are regarded by many foreign critics as incompatible with Western standards of democracy and human rights. The Turkish constitution nonetheless guarantees to the individual freedom of religious belief and observance.
3. In a recent somewhat similar case, Turkish defendants were acquitted. The outlook for the British and other foreign defendants is therefore probably good. But it is quite possible that, even if acquitted, they will find that residence permits are not renewed and that, in consequence, they have to leave Turkey. I doubt whether the Prime Minister will come under serious pressure, eg her press conference, to answer specific questions about a case which is now sub judice. But it may well be raised in the wider context of human rights in Turkey, and whether or not she took this up with Mr Özal.

T L A Daunt

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