

THREE KILLED IN ATTACK ON BIBLE PUBLISHING HOUSE

published: Thursday | April 19, 2007

<http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20070419/int/int5.html>

ISTANBUL, Turkey (AP):

Assailants killed three people yesterday at a publishing house that distributed Bibles, in the latest attack apparently targeting Turkey's small Christian minority.



Turkish police officers detain a suspect following an attack at a publishing house in the south-eastern Turkish city of Malatya, yesterday. Attackers slit the throats of three people, including a German, at a Turkish Bible publisher's yesterday, officials said, the latest attack on minorities in mainly Muslim Turkey. - Reuters

The three victims were found with their throats slit and their hands and legs bound at the Zirve publishing house in Malatya, a city in eastern central Turkey, local Gov. Ibrahim Dasoz said. One was found still alive, and was taken to the hospital but later died, he said.

Two of the victims were Turkish, and one was a German who had lived in Malatya since 2003, Dasoz said. The German ambassador to Turkey said he was shocked by the attack.

"Even if the exact circumstances of the crime are not yet known, I most strongly condemn this brutal crime," Ambassador Eckart Cuntz said in a statement. The government-run Anatolia news agency identified the German as 46-year-old Tilman Ekkehart Geske.

A man who jumped from a window to escape was hospitalised with injuries and underwent surgery.

Police detained four suspects, and believe the man who jumped from the window was one of the attackers and leapt out to avoid arrest, according to the Malatya governor, Dasoz. Anatolia said all five suspects - aged 19 and 20 - were preparing for the university entrance exam and were friends from the same students' residence. They were all carrying a letter that read: "We five are brothers. We are going to our deaths. We may not return," according to Anatolia.

Malatya is known as a hotbed of nationalists, and is also the hometown of Mehmet Ali Agca, who shot Pope John Paul II in 1981.

The Zirve publishing house has been the site of previous protests by nationalists accusing it of proselytising in this 99 per cent Muslim but secular country, Dogan news agency reported.

LA Times - 3 killed in attack on Bible publisher in Turkey

Five youths -- all with notes that say, 'They are attacking our religion' -- are held at the scene.

By Laura King, Times Staff Writer

April 19, 2007

ISTANBUL, TURKEY — In a gruesome attack that sent shockwaves through Turkey's tiny Christian community, assailants Wednesday slit the throats of three men at a publishing house that distributes Bibles and other Christian literature.

Five youths were detained at the scene in the conservative eastern city of Malatya, Turkish authorities said. One news report said the suspects carried notes indicating their motive was right-wing nationalism.

Turkey's sometimes hostile stance toward its own religious and ethnic minorities has been a persistent source of concern to Western governments as the country presses ahead with its campaign for European Union membership.

Although the government officially preaches tolerance, it historically has failed to rein in virulent ultranationalist groups. Authorities were accused of ignoring repeated death threats against Hrant Dink, an ethnic Armenian newspaper editor who was gunned down outside his offices in Istanbul in January. Prosecutors later said a teenager confessed to the shooting.

At the Zirve publishing house in Malatya's city center, police discovered the three victims bound hand and foot and tied to chairs with their throats cut. Two were dead; the third died later at a hospital.

All were believed to have been workers at the publishing house. One of the dead men had German citizenship, the German Embassy confirmed.

Christians make up less than 1% of the population of 71 million in this officially secular but overwhelmingly Muslim country. However, they are regarded with deep suspicion by right-wing groups, particularly if they are seen to be involved in proselytizing of any kind.

Malatya, about 500 miles southeast of Istanbul, has long been considered a

stronghold of Turkish nationalism, laced with anti-Christian sentiment. Mehmet Ali Agca, who shot Pope John Paul II in 1981, was from the city.

One of the five youths in custody suffered serious head injuries when he jumped from a third-story window of the publishing house as police officers arrived. They were summoned by visitors who were worried when they received no response to their knocks.

Police said the other four young men, who were found standing over the blood-soaked victims, were being questioned, but authorities declined to discuss what the initial investigation had revealed.

One Turkish television station, Channel D, said in a report from Malatya that the youths all carried an identical note declaring: "We did this for our country.... They are attacking our religion."

The Zirve publishing house, whose name means "Summit," had previously been the target of ultranationalist protests and threats. Turkish television showed footage of one such demonstration in Malatya in 2005, in which the mostly youthful marchers chanted slogans denouncing Christian evangelism.

"There has been a mood against Christian missionaries for a long time, despite the tradition of tolerance in the old Ottoman Empire," said Mustafa Akyol, a Turkish columnist and analyst who writes often on interfaith issues. "Turkey is becoming an insecure place for minorities in general."

Protests erupted in Turkey before a historic visit in November by Pope Benedict XVI, although his pilgrimage was not marred by any major violence. In February 2006, an Italian Roman Catholic priest was fatally shot by a teenager as the clergyman prayed in his church in the Black Sea port of Trabzon, the most serious of several attacks on Christian leaders last year.

Turkey's Christians are mostly Armenian Orthodox, who number about 65,000. About 20,000 are Roman Catholic, with smaller numbers of Greek Orthodox and Protestants.

king@latimes.com