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ABUSIVE PRACTICE OF "UNMODIFIED" ELECTROSHOCK TREATMENT ABOLISHED AT MAIN PSYCHIATRIC FACILITY OF TURKEY

MDRI CALLS ON GOVERNMENT OF TURKEY TO BAN THIS ABUSIVE PRACTICE NATIONWIDE

Washington, DC –Mental Disability Rights International (MDRI) announced this week that the use of electroconvulsive or "shock" treatment (ECT) *without* the use of anesthesia and muscle relaxants (known as unmodified ECT) has been abolished at Bakirköy. The facility, located in Istanbul, has more than 2900 beds and is Turkey's largest psychiatric hospital. MDRI staff in Turkey were informed about these developments from leading Turkish psychiatrists and staff at Bakirköy.

MDRI's report, ***Behind Closed Doors: Human Rights Abuses in the Psychiatric Facilities, Orphanages and Rehabilitation Centers of Turkey***, documented the use of unmodified ECT on both adults and children at the state-run Bakirköy. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture called on Turkey to terminate the practice in 1997. The World Health Organization (WHO) has also called for a worldwide ban. Despite this, unmodified ECT was used until the release of ***Behind Closed Doors***. MDRI's September 2005 report garnered international media attention in Turkey as the country began its accession talks with the European Union (EU). MDRI's findings were cited as a concern in the November 2005 EU Commission's report on human rights in Turkey.

While praising Turkey for this development, MDRI has expressed concerns. In a letter transmitted today to the Turkish Ministry of Health, MDRI Executive Director Eric Rosenthal stated that "MDRI applauds the government of Turkey for ending this inhuman, degrading and frightening practice at Bakirköy. Yet, to our knowledge, there remains no legal ban on unmodified ECT in Turkey. We call on the government to adopt an enforceable law to prevent such abuse in the future." MDRI also expressed concerns about the use of unmodified ECT in other parts of Turkey and called for a public report on the practice. Rosenthal said that "MDRI will continue to monitor the use of unmodified ECT in Turkey."

Behind Closed Doors is available in English and Turkish at www.mdri.org

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