

# **Murder of Christians in Turkey condemned: Three killed at publishing house**

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The killing of three Christians at a religious publishing house in eastern Turkey has triggered strong condemnation by U.S. and international church and advocacy groups. Twelve suspects were charged on April 22 with the killings of the three men—Necati Aydin and Ugur Yuksel, both Turkish Christians, and Tilman Ekkehart Geske, a German national—in slayings that have prompted concerns about the safety of the minority Christian community in Turkey.

“We condemn this act of violence against Turkish Christians. We must find a way of resolving conflict without resorting to these kinds of brutal acts,” Geoff Tunnicliffe, international director of the World Evangelical Alliance, said in a statement issued April 20 from New York.

The three victims reportedly died after their throats were slit and they were tied up at the publishing house in the city of Malatya, Turkey. The publishing house, Zirve, had distributed Bibles in the Turkish language and had been the focus of recent protests, the Associated Press reported.

Germany’s top Protestant bishop condemned the killings and offered sympathy to the relatives of the victims. “The Bible bears witness to the word of life,” said Bishop Wolfgang Huber, who heads the Evangelical Church in Germany. “Offering this word to others can never be a reason for people’s lives to be threatened.”

News of the April 18 killings has stirred apprehension in Germany, where Turkish immigrants are the nation’s largest ethnic group—about 2.5 million people—and Islam is the largest minority religion.

German chancellor Angela Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union— which opposes Turkey’s bid for membership in the European Union—said that the attacks illustrate

Turkey's shortcomings in ensuring religious freedom.

Thomas Wipf, the president of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, noted that Muslims in Malatya had "spontaneously shown solidarity with the victims" and said the event should not engender further "political exploitation of religion." Added Wipf: "Our religions are peace movements. Witness to God is incompatible with the use of violence." -*Ecumenical News International, Religion News Service*