

**An Advocates of Silenced
Turkey Special Report
April, 2017**



**REPORT:
TURKEY MUST ENSURE FREEDOM OF
RELIGION UNDER ITS JURISDICTION**

1. Introduction

Especially after the corruption investigations that were launched at the end of 2013, the government started targeting the Hizmet Movement (a.k.a. Gulen Movement) claiming that the group was behind the investigations. The corruption case was about members of the ruling party and their family members including sons of cabinet ministers. Even more, the case was allegedly reaching out to then prime-minister Erdogan and his son. The situation got even worsened after the so-called attempted coup happened in July 15, 2016. Erdogan, now the president, has been accusing the Movement of masterminding the coup attempt, whereas the Movement has been strongly denying their involvement. The state of emergency was declared to weather the storm; however, it was then transformed to a tool to justify the government's strict measures. Main group attacked has been the Hizmet Movement, nonetheless, many people from other dissident groups have also been suffering from the government's applications. Excessive number of people belonging to dissident groups have either been arrested, imprisoned, faced torture during imprisonment or dismissed from their jobs. There have also been other examples of human rights violations such as asset seizure, passport cancellations and psychological pressure. Not only real persons but also legal entities founded by dissidents were also targeted and shut down by decree laws adopted without parliamentary and judicial oversight during the state of emergency.

Especially in recent years, freedom of religion has been under attack in most countries with the rise of oppressive regimes. Turkey is also one of these states limiting religious freedoms. Different religious communities took their shares from the government's arbitrary implementations. This paper will talk about the different types of discriminatory practices religious groups have been facing in Turkey recently. It will be evaluated whether freedom of religion and belief is respected at the level required the internationally accepted standards. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper different statements from government officials as well as the government's actions targeting religious groups will be mentioned below.

Firstly, general overview will be provided on freedom of religion. This part will mention international human rights documents protecting freedom of religion. Next part will talk about the situation in Turkey. After giving some information on the domestic legislation indicating the problems in terms of religious freedoms, current issues will be talked about which will be followed by the conclusion.

2. General Information on Freedom of Religion

Freedom of religion has been recognized in almost all international human rights documents as one of the fundamental human rights of every human being. Freedom of religion is a broad concept that is composed of different components in different texts such as freedom to adopt,

change or renounce a religion or belief, freedom from coercion, the right to manifest one's religion or belief, the right of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children as well as prohibition of discrimination on the basis of religion or belief. Whereas freedom to have a religion or to believe is an absolute right, other components differ in different contexts. Various international human rights documents stipulate freedom of religion with small differences between them. For instance, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ("ICCPR"), which has been ratified by almost all countries around the world, in its Article 18 includes all the components abovementioned.¹ Even more, the Human Rights Committee ("HRC") in General Comment No. 22 clarifies the scope of Article 18 that it also protects freedom to worship which extends to the places of worship and religious symbols.² According to the HRC, "Article 18 protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief."³ The United Nations General Assembly also adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.⁴

Similar to the ICCPR, the European Convention on Human Rights ("ECHR"),⁵ the American Convention on Human Rights ("ACHR")⁶ and the African Charter on Human and Peoples'

¹ ICCPR Article 18: 1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. 2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice. 3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. 4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

² HRC, *CCPR General Comment No. 22: Article 18 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion)*, 30 July 1993, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fb22.html> [accessed 30 March 2018].

³ *Ibid*, para. 2. It must be noted that later on the same paragraph, the concepts of "religion" and "belief" are interpreted broadly and are not limited to the ones that are traditionally known and institutionalized.

⁴ UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, 25 November 1981, A/RES/36/55, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f02e40.html> [accessed 5 April 2018].

⁵ ECHR Article 9 Freedom of thought, conscience and religion: 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance. 2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

⁶ ACHR Article 12. Freedom of Conscience and Religion: 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience and of religion. This right includes freedom to maintain or to change one's religion or beliefs, and freedom to profess or disseminate one's religion or beliefs, either individually or together with others, in public or in private. 2. No one shall be subject to restrictions that might impair his freedom to maintain or to change his religion or beliefs. 3. Freedom to manifest one's religion and beliefs may be subject only to the limitations prescribed by law that are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals, or the rights or freedoms of others. 4. Parents or guardians, as the case may be, have the right to provide for the religious and moral education of their children or wards that is in accord with their own convictions.

Rights (“ACHPR”)⁷ as well as the Arab Charter on Human Rights⁸ recognize freedom of religion. Even though most of the countries ratifying the ICCPR and other treaties recognize freedom of religion to some extent in their domestic legislation, religious freedoms around the world are not at the level desired by the international standards.

Countries, unfortunately, use limitation clauses enshrined in the treaties as an excuse to their violations. The ICCPR, for example, does not stipulate freedom of religion as an unconditional and absolute right and thus has a limitation clause in Article 18 (3). Accordingly, limitations are allowed only under some conditions such as to be prescribed by law and be necessary for the protection of public in a democratic society. The ECHR also has a similar exception clause. However, both the HRC and European Court of Human Rights (“ECtHR”) interpret these limitation clauses strictly, which means that national governments can only limit freedom of religion under certain conditions.⁹

Last but not least we have to draw attention to the fact that the ICCPR classifies Article 18 as one of the non-derogable rights in its Article 4 (2) meaning that even in cases of emergency states cannot derogate from their responsibilities to ensure freedom of religion. The ECHR does not include freedom of religion to the scope of non-derogable rights. Nevertheless, if a state is bound by the ICCPR, it must yet respect freedom of religion according to ICCPR Articles 4 and 18. Some states like Turkey abuse their right to derogate from human rights treaties in cases of emergency. Nonetheless, both the ICCPR and ECHR are binding on Turkey. Hence, even though the Turkish government derogated from both, it must still ensure freedom of religion as per the ICCPR.

3. Freedom of Religion in Turkey: National Legislation and Current Situation in terms of Religious Freedoms

As abovementioned, freedom of religion is protected under international human rights law documents binding on Turkey which are the ICCPR and the ECHR. Both treaties include manifestation of one’s religion and belief to the scope of freedom of religion. Moreover, because the ICCPR specifies Article 18 as non-derogable in Article 4, meaning that even during the state of emergency going on in the country, the government must respect freedom

⁷ ACHPR Article 8: Freedom of conscience, the profession and free practice of religion shall be guaranteed. No one may, subject to law and order, be submitted to measures restricting the exercise of these freedoms.

⁸ Arab Charter Article 30: 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and no restrictions may be imposed on the exercise of such freedoms except as provided for by law. 2. The freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs or to perform religious observances, either alone or in community with others, shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a tolerant society that respects human rights and freedoms for the protection of public safety, public order, public health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. 3. Parents or guardians have the freedom to provide for the religious and moral education of their children.

⁹ OSCE, *Know Your Rights: What is Freedom of Religion?*, 1 October 2014, HDIM.NGO/0401/14, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/124839?download=true> [accessed 30 March 2018], p. 11.

of religion and belief and cannot derogate from its responsibilities. Therefore, Turkey is obligated to ensure that freedom of religion is respected at all levels under its jurisdiction. However, Turkey's record in terms of religious freedom has not been much praiseworthy. Since its foundation, Turkey has been somehow restricting freedom of religion and belief. Only three groups are recognized officially as minorities which are Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox and Jews in the Treaty of Lausanne.¹⁰ This means all Muslim communities and other non-Muslim groups are not protected specially. This situation itself actually creates inequality between the groups, even though the Constitution promotes for equality.

As might be known, Turkey has been a secular country since 1928 when the provision indicating the state's religion as Islam was removed as an amendment to the 1924 Constitution. The state has been trying to be equidistant to all religions and beliefs. Nevertheless, the concept of secularism is interpreted strictly in Turkey which is aimed at absence of religion in public areas. No religious group in Turkey, including Sunni Muslims – as the majority group, has full legal status and all are subject to various limitations by the state.¹¹ Even though the majority of people are Sunni Muslim, headscarf has been a problem for a long time. For the sake of secularism, women were not allowed to wear headscarf in many public places such as universities and schools. Moreover, public servants were not able to wear headscarf till recently.

As the most important law in Turkish legislation, the Turkish Constitution of 1982, which is in force now, protects freedom of religion and conscience in its Article 24 and 25. Accordingly, "Everyone has the freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction. Acts of worship, religious rites and ceremonies shall be conducted freely, as long as they do not violate the provisions of Article 14."¹² Together with freedom of belief and worship, the private dissemination of religious ideas must be respected as well.¹³ The Constitution also prohibits any form of discrimination including on the ground of religion. Moreover, as per Article 15 (2), even in circumstances requiring the state of emergency, no one can be compelled to reveal his/her religion, conscience, thought or opinion.

On the other hand, there is an official state institution named the Presidency of Religious Affairs having control over the Islamic practice (mostly Sunni branch). Opening of mosques

¹⁰ Minority Rights Group International (MRGI), *A Quest for Equality: Minorities in Turkey*, December 2007, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/47665e602.html> [accessed 2 April 2018], p. 3.

¹¹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *USCIRF Annual Report 2017 - Tier 2 countries - Turkey*, 26 April 2017, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/59072f3913.html> [accessed 6 April 2018].

¹² Article 14 which is referred in this provision prohibits abuse of fundamental rights and freedoms included in the Constitution; *Constitution of the Republic of Turkey*, 7 November 1982, available at:

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b5be0.html> [accessed 14 February 2018].

¹³ USCIRF.

is regulated by the Presidency and mosques are monitored and funded by the state. This is indeed criticized by the supporters of secularism. Muslim groups other than common Sunni understanding in the country such as Alevis¹⁴ and Jafaris¹⁵ are not represented within the Presidency.¹⁶ Even though the Law founding the Presidency categorizes Alevi belief as part of Islam, in practice the institution only serves Sunni Muslims and does not address specific needs of the Alevi community.¹⁷ The Presidency itself has also been criticized a lot especially recently because of following Erdogan's own political agenda. Weekly sermons to be preached during Friday prayers are prepared by the Presidency and serve Erdogan and the government's interests.¹⁸ When public react to these sermons, they are at risk to be detained.¹⁹

3.1. Alevi Community

Alevis are one of the main groups facing discrimination in Turkey. Their places of worships, *Cemevis* (Cem houses), have been forcefully shut down by the government and are not accepted officially as places of worship. There were even attempts to transform them into mosques. The recognition of minority's rights and status, such as right to establish their own institutions, worship places and freely express and practice their faith openly in public, is a problem that has not been addressed since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. Even though Alevis are the second-largest group of Muslims after Sunni Muslims, they have been having these crucial problems regarding recognition for a long time.

As Alevis do not have the legal status and are not accepted as a different belief than Sunni Islam by the Presidency, their worship places (*Cemevis*) are not recognized officially by the state. This was the issue in the case of *Izzettin Dogan and Others v. Turkey*.²⁰ The Court decided that Turkey has not been protecting the applicant's right to manifest their religion properly by not providing them religious services in the form of public service, not granting *Cemevis* the status of "places of worship," not recruiting their religious leaders as civil servants and lastly by not providing them funding as part of the Directorate of Religious Affairs's budget. In the light of these, the ECtHR decided on the violation of Article 9 and Article 14. The state was seen as unneutral and partial by the ECtHR due to its attitude.²¹ There is a small improvement in this regard that Alevi *dedes* (religious leaders) are now

¹⁴ Alevis are another branch of Islam different than the common sect of Islam within Turkey. Alevis are identified as both Sunni or Shia by different groups.

¹⁵ Jafaris are the principal Shia community in Turkey.

¹⁶ MRGI, p. 21.

¹⁷ Sirin, Tolga, et al. *Türkiye'de Din ve Vicdan Özgürlüğü: Sorunlar, Tespitler Ve Çözüm Önerileri*. Türkiye Barolar Birliği İnsan Hakları Merkezi, tbbyayinlari.barobirlik.org.tr/TBBBooks/546.pdf, p. 62.

¹⁸ "Diyanet'ten AK Parti'ye Hutbe Desteği." *Haberler.com*, 28 Mar. 2014, www.haberler.com/diyanet-ten-skandal-cuma-hutbesi-5839105-haberi/.

¹⁹ "Siyasi Hutbeye Tepki Gösteren Cemaat Gözaltına Alındı." *Artı Gerçek*, 26 Jan. 2018, www.artigercek.com/siyasi-hutbeye-tepki-gosteren-cemaat-gozaltina-alindi.

²⁰ ECtHR, *Izzettin Dogan and Others v. Turkey*, Application No. 62649/10, 26 April 2016.

²¹ *Ibid.*, para. 182.

accepted as field experts, however, considering the standards pointed out by international human rights bodies, more improvements are still expected.

Alevi are also targeted by public officials and society. For instance, Mehmet Gormez, former President of the Directorate of Religious Affairs which is an official state institution, has explicitly said they have had two redlines which are not to classify Alevism as different than regular understanding of Islam and not to accept *Cemevis* as an alternative worship place to mosques.²² Alevis have been attacked by the society as well. Short time ago, houses of Alevi citizens in Malatya were marked with crosses in red color by unknown people for intimidation.²³

Basic religious education has been mandatory in schools according to Article 24 of the Constitution which is again a contested issue. Only non-Muslim students can be exempted from this compulsory course. However, they would be labeled leading to social ostracism among their friends who are mostly Sunni Muslims. Furthermore, another issue raising concerns is that Muslim students other than Sunnis (such as Alevis) must also follow the same syllabus which is dominantly driven by Sunni Muslim understanding. Compulsory religious education was even brought before the ECtHR by an Alevi family. The court stated it was a violation and that Turkey must reform its policy because the content was not seen as objective and pluralist by the Court.²⁴

²² Girit, Selin. "Cemevleri: İbadethane mi kırmızı çizgi mi? - BBC Türkçe." *BBC News*, 7 Jan. 2016, www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/01/160107_alevi_cemevi_selingirit.

²³ Gokatalay, Selahattin. "Malatya'da Alevilerin evlerinin işaretlenmesine tepki: Korkuyu Kербela'da bıraktık." *Cumhuriyet*, 23 Nov. 2017, www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/872342/Malatya_da_Alevilerin_evlerinin_isaretlenmesine_tepki_Korku_yu_Kerbela_da_biraktik.html.

²⁴ ECtHR, Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey, Application No. 1448/04, 9 October 2007, para. 70.

3.2. Non-Muslim Groups

Non-Muslim religious groups have also been experiencing different problems. The General Directorate of Foundations regulates the activities and status of the non-Muslim groups such as Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox and Jews. However, striking point is that there is no reference to any groups of minorities in the Constitution, not even to the ones officially recognized.²⁵ Furthermore, there is still no specific law regulating the rights and status of religious minorities, but, on the contrary, various laws limit their rights.²⁶ For example, one of the biggest problem they face is that properties of these groups were confiscated, and thus property rights were infringed by the state itself. Some of the properties were returned (or compensation paid) since 2003. Nevertheless, there are yet some complaints by particular communities due to the denials and delays.²⁷

The Treaty of Lausanne stipulates the rights of non-Muslim minorities and provides them the right to have religious instruction (only for the three recognized groups).²⁸ Nonetheless, minority schools face different types of problems in terms of permission, curriculum, textbooks because of strict state control over schools. There is also bias against non-Muslims within the society as well. In public schools, for example, students read textbooks that include discriminatory language against non-Muslims which is seen by some people as the reason behind persecutions against some groups such as Armenians.²⁹

Other non-Muslim groups such as Atheists, Protestants and Assyrians are not protected in anyway. For instance, Protestants had to deal with long and challenging bureaucratic procedures to get permission for church construction.³⁰ They are not allowed to have their own schools teaching their culture.

3.3. Hizmet Movement

Especially after the corruption investigations that were launched at the end of 2013, the government started targeting the Hizmet Movement (a.k.a. Gulen Movement) claiming that the group was behind the investigations. The corruption case was about members of the ruling party and their family members including sons of cabinet ministers. Even more, the case was allegedly reaching out to then prime-minister Erdogan and his son. The situation got even worsened after the so-called attempted coup happened in July 15, 2016. Erdogan, now the president, has been accusing the Movement of masterminding the coup attempt, whereas the Movement has been strongly denying their involvement. The state of emergency was declared

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ USCIRF, p. 189.

²⁸ MRGI, p. 20.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

to weather the storm; however, it was then transformed to a tool to justify the government's strict measures. Main group attacked has been the Hizmet Movement, nonetheless, many people from other dissident groups have also been suffering from the government's applications. Excessive number of people belonging to dissident groups have either been arrested, imprisoned, faced torture during imprisonment or dismissed from their jobs. Even an American pastor has been jailed because of his alleged ties with the Movement.³¹ There have also been other examples of human rights violations such as asset seizure, passport cancellations and psychological pressure. Not only real persons but also legal entities founded by dissidents were also targeted and shut down by decree laws adopted without parliamentary and judicial oversight during the state of emergency. Schools founded by the Movement, for instance, were shut down by the government via decree laws and transformed into *imam hatip* schools.³²

As abovementioned, the Hizmet Movement, a movement that is mainly inspired by a religious cleric Fethullah Gulen, became a target of the Turkish government for religious persecution and marginalization. Ironically, Fethullah Gulen advocates Sunni-Hanafi-Maturidi Islamic tradition, which symbolizes the belief system of the majority in Turkey. In fact, Fethullah Gulen is a retired cleric who worked for the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Turkey for his whole life. However, in the aftermath of the coup attempt, the Turkish government acknowledges no ethical boundaries at all and declares the Hizmet Movement as 'Firak-i Dalle' (perverted faith) through the propaganda of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.³³ This term has been frequently used against the Movement and has caused social pressure leading to more discrimination in social life. The Ministry of Religious Affairs consistently publishes sermons constituting verbal harassments towards the Movement every Friday to be read in every mosque during Friday prayers which is, according to Islam not to the state law, obligatory for all Muslim men to attend. Therefore, those statements are heard by majority of the public attending Friday prayers.

President Erdogan has been targeting the Movement directly in almost all of his speeches. After the corruption investigations in 2013, Erdogan started calling Mr. Gulen a false prophet (and later on terrorist) because he thought his sympathizers were behind the investigations

³¹ Maza, Cristina. "A U.S. Pastor Could Spend 35 Years in a Turkish Prison Because Erdogan Wants to Use Him as a Bargaining Chip." *Newsweek*, 21 March 2018, www.newsweek.com/turkey-us-pastor-andrew-brunson-jailed-turkey-35-years-because-erdogan-854221.

³² Imam hatip schools were first founded to educate imams (Islamic religious leader) to be employed by the government. Current government opened new imam hatip schools as well as increased their budget. United States Department of State, *2016 Report on International Religious Freedom - Turkey*, 15 August 2017, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/59b7d82a13.html> [accessed 7 April 2018], p. 14.

³³ "Abubakar Aliyu: Hizmet'e firak-ı dalle diyenlere meydan okuyorum, delillerinizi getirin." *Tr724*, 23 Oct. 2016, www.tr724.com/abubakar-aliyu-hizmete-firak-i-dalle-diyenlere-meydan-okuyorum-delillerinizi-getirin/.

against the government.³⁴ Following the so-called attempted coup, Erdogan started blaming the Movement to be a terrorist organization with Mr. Gulen as the leader. He has been referring to the Movement and Mr. Gulen and humiliating them constantly.³⁵ Erdogan's attitude creates a chilling effect within Turkey that no one could freely listen to Mr. Gulen or could express objective thoughts about him.

The Movement is also targeted by the members of government besides Erdogan who mentions Mr. Gulen almost in all of his speeches. For instance, Forestry Minister Veysel Eroglu once said Mr. Gulen "will end up dying in the US and be buried in a Jewish cemetery."³⁶ Mehmet Gormez, former President of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, once said following the "Extraordinary Religious Council" that attributes imputed to the Movement and Mr. Gulen cannot be reconciled with Islam. These indeed prove that the Directorate of Religious Affairs, together with the government, targets the Movement and its members specifically because of their relation with Mr. Gulen.³⁷ In a speech Gormez made last year, he explicitly stated that Erdogan himself has ordered reports to be prepared by the Extraordinary Religious Council against the Hizmet Movement.³⁸ During this Council's meetings Erdogan listed what he wanted from the participant religious leaders, moreover, he asked from foreigner participants to target Mr. Gulen in their own countries as well.³⁹

In today's Turkey, admiring Mr. Gulen, reading his books and listening to his sermons are considered as actions of crime and people who revere him are labeled as terrorists. Therefore, individuals are not free to choose which understanding of Islam or which Islamic scholar to follow. People could be arrested only because of having Mr. Gulen's books in their homes⁴⁰ or his videos on their computers.⁴¹

³⁴ "Başbakan Erdoğan'dan 'Sahte Peygamber' Ifadesi." *CNN Türk*, 25 Jan. 2014, www.cnntrk.com/haber/turkiye/basbakan-erdogandan-sahte-peygamber-ifadesi. "Erdoğan'dan Gülen'e, Cübbeli Terörist Göndermesi." *Timeturk*, 16 May 2015, www.timeturk.com/erdogan-dan-gulen-e-cubbeli-terorist-gondermesi/haber-2383.

³⁵ "Cumhurbaşkanı'ndan FETÖ'ye Beddua!" *Sozcu*, 31 Mar. 2018, www.sozcu.com.tr/2018/gundem/2322857-2322857/. "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Kosova'dakilerin Akibeti Neyse Seninki De o Olacak." *TRT Haber*, 1 Apr. 2018, www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-kosovadakilerin-akibeti-neyse-seninki-de-olacak-358288.html.

³⁶ "Gülen Will Die in US and Be Buried in Jewish Cemetery: Turkish Forestry Minister." *Hürriyet Daily News*, 7 Dec. 2016, www.hurriyetdailynews.com/gulen-will-die-in-us-and-be-buried-in-jewish-cemetery-turkish-forestry-minister-107018.

³⁷ "Din Şûrası Sonuç Bildirgesi açıklandı." *Yeni Şafak*, 4 Aug. 2016, www.yenisafak.com/hayat/din-s%C3%BBra-sonuc-bildirgesi-aciklandi-2505531.

³⁸ Gormez, Mehmet. *Diyanet Basın Merkezi*, 14 July 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbaCDJKVgWI&t=21s>.

³⁹ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 11 October 2016, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/53559/9-avraya-islam-srasi-acilisinda-yaptiklari-konusma.html>.

⁴⁰ "University Student Detained over Fingerprints on Gülen Books." *Turkey Purge*, 11 July 2017, turkeypurge.com/university-student-detained-over-fingerprints-on-gulen-books.

⁴¹ "Teacher Arrested after Repairman Found Gülen's Audio CD in Computer." *Turkey Purge*, 22 June 2017, turkeypurge.com/teacher-arrested-after-repairman-found-gulens-audio-cd-in-computer.

4. Conclusion

Considering all different types of persecutions religious communities have been suffering, one cannot say that Turkey is complying with its responsibilities under the 1982 Constitution, the ICCPR as well as the ECHR. If the country is secular, then it must be equidistant from all types of beliefs and at the same time providing freedom to all types of beliefs. The government cannot and should not follow President Erdogan's personal political agenda but should be objective, neutral and impartial towards all different religious communities. Also, individuals should not be distanced from their religions by way of public speeches and media broadcasts. As the Advocates of Silenced Turkey, we would like to remind the Turkish government that it is obligated to ensure freedom of religion under its jurisdiction and also that it must align its domestic law and practices with internationally accepted human rights standards.