

**An Advocates of Silenced
Turkey Special Report
July, 2018**



REPORT:

**THE CONFISCATIONS AND
SMEAR CAMPAIGNS BY
TURKISH GOVERNMENT
THROUGH MAARIF
FOUNDATION IN AFRICA**

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Prologue

Erdoğan government's education policy consists of generalizing the imam hatip high-schools which provide mainly religious education, and forcing the students to choose one of these schools. In addition to this, it has been approximately 20 years since AKP (Justice and Development Party) took over the country, and the education system has been changing too many times within this period, only to end up with a more complicated system which has been far from providing any benefits at all.

While all the ongoing commotion in the country, the lynching campaign started by the Erdoğan regime both to cover up the 17/25 December corruption and bribe investigations and to punish the Gülen Movement , is now stretched out to the schools affiliated with The Movement abroad. Briefly, Erdoğan started a state-sanctioned seizure operation through the Maarif Foundation, against the schools and subsidiaries affiliated with The Movement abroad to seize them.

Erdoğan's statements to legitimate these unlawful operations are full of contradictions. As a matter of fact, his argument in order to seize the institutions affiliated with The Movement advocates that the establishment of the schools located both in the country and abroad were financed by the people and their help, so the state laying claims to them is quite natural. However, Erdoğan does not refrain to claim that the people who donate to the institutions of Movement are terrorists.

1. Purpose of Establishment of Maarif Foundation

Maarif Foundation was established as a part of the plan which aims to end The Movement both inside the country and abroad as per the mental foundation. Just like the president of the Maarif Foundation confirmed in an interview, that the Maarif Foundation currently targeted the Turkish schools abroad for them to be seized unlawfully. In case they cannot achieve this, they want to have the schools closed down permanently.

“One of our goals is to ensure the schools which we couldn’t seize to be closed down. We know that FETÖ has around six hundred schools in the world. We reached about two hundred of them together with the take overs and closures. And for the schools which we couldn’t take over or have them closed down, we establish alternative schools in the region as a competitive institution.”¹

As it is seen, a hostility is in question, which unlawfully targets the schools those have been contributing to the education for more than 30 years as a social project based on voluntariness without any discrimination between rich and poor. The most heartbreaking point is that this hostility is being carried out on behalf of a state, and all of the institutions of the state is being made an instrument to the chains of unlawfulness.

Maarif Foundation, which is decorated with rich facilities, only managed to establish one school until now, except the schools which were unlawfully taken over from The Movement. Unfortunately, this school is also mixed in the scandal before even getting opened. The individual who was appointed as a principal to this school is accused of covering a sexual abuse scandal in Turkey recently. The extent of the abuse is so big that the number of children who are confirmed to have been abused is over 30. ²

Similarly, another scandal, which is the extension of Erdoğan Government and the Maarif Foundation, has occurred in Albania. One of the open manifestations of the political Islam perception in Turkey, which is formed into a more radical structure every single day, occurred in Albania through the hands of an official who works in an institution supported by the Turkish government. Emine Alushi, a teacher who is affiliated with Tika and the Maarif Foundation, is arrested on the grounds of openly making ISIL propaganda. ³

¹ Maarif Vakfı yönetim kurulu üyesi Mustafa Çaltılı’nın beyanları

<http://www.dunyabizim.com/etkinlik/28040/turkiye-maarif-vakfi-neler-yapiyor>

² <http://www.tr724.com/tecavuzu-gizleyen-muduru-maarif-vakfinin-yurtdisindaki-ilk-okuluna-atadilar/>

³ <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/01/19/albanian-teacher-arrested-for-pro-is-propaganda.html>

<http://hizmetnews.com/21150/isis-infiltrates-erdogans-maarif-foundation/> <http://zamanromania.ro/albania-o-profesoara-a-scolii-fondate-de-catre-erdogan-a-fost-arestata-pentru-propaganda-isis/>

The constitution of Maarif Foundation states the following as their goals; providing education services outside Turkey and improve the education studies; providing scholarships throughout all of the periods of education starting from pre-school and including university; establishing schools, education institutions, and dormitories; raise educators who can be assigned to such domestic and abroad institutions; carrying out scientific researches, and research-development, broadcasting and developing methods; and providing educational activities which are compatible with the local regulations of the related country. ⁴

2. The Status of Education System in Turkey ranked last among 32 "OECD" Countries

However, a question for the average intelligence, and objectiveness in nature; how could Turkey, a country whose Ministry of Education has been struggling seriously about the curriculum for many years, export education to different countries?

As a matter of fact, according to a report published by the Turkish Statistical Institute, only 11% of the population is a bachelor. ⁵ A student's book reading rate in Turkey is 2.7 per year. A total of 123.000 schools are closed down for different reasons, particularly in southern Turkey including some of the villages. Around 70 thousand teachers were fired or suspended from duty in public and private schools after 15 July 2016 coup attempt. According to the current situation, the public schools are desperately in need of teachers. A report by the Istanbul Social Researches Survey Bureau revealed that 53% of the students in public schools are smokers. The rate of the ones who use drugs increased to 15%.

According to the PISA report, published by OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) every 3 years on a regular basis, with the participation of 540 thousand students aged 15 in 72 different countries, Turkey's level on education, which is already low, has even gotten lower. Turkey is 50th among 72 countries. Within the 32 OECD countries, Turkey is in the last place. Despite Turkey's bad situation towards providing education and acting like it has anything to offer in terms of education alone is quite enough to demonstrate that the real goal of the initiative of the Maarif Foundation is not education.

⁴ <https://turkiyemaarif.org/page/12-tmv-kanunu-11>

⁵ <https://www.akademikpersonel.org/anasayfa/universite-mezunu-orani-avrupa-turkiye.html>

It is a discussion topic how successful could this anomaly be, which the country is trying to spread throughout the world over a foundation that was established pell-mell without any plans, by wiping out a group which is demonized because of the fact that they do not support the current government, while facing many deadlock education problems.

3. Confiscation Incidents

There isn't one useful step taken in the Maarif Foundation, aside from the news of a series of scandals and seizures since the day it was established. The demonstrations and presentations are nothing but the fruits of many years of efforts of the educators, who were stigmatized as terrorists, of the schools which were seized. Apparently, the extent of the seizure is not only limited to these education institutions and the financial assets of them, but also to the years of efforts. ⁶

Maarif Foundation states that they have made agreements to seize the schools located in Senegal, Mauritania, Chad, Gabon, Burkina Faso, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. ⁷ Maarif Foundation, which intensified their seizing actions on the countries where the judicial pedestals could be flexible through the political favoritism, and which are in an economically bad situation, is supported by state or religious institutions such as TİKA, YTB (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities), Yunus Emre Foundation, Religious Affairs, The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH).

Maarif Foundation also listed the schools which they have eyes on, and according to this list The Movement has 15 schools in Australia, 150 schools in 9 countries in America, 106 schools in 36 countries in Africa, 175 schools in 35 countries in Europe, and 242 schools in 32 countries in Asia, a total of 688 schools in 113 countries. ⁸

The contradiction faced by the Maarif Foundation is so big, that Mustafa Çaltılı, board member of the foundation, almost makes a confession about the unlawful steps they had taken and the violation of rights, and admits that they do not expect the schools to be transferred to them which are located in USA and European countries, where modern law is applied and there is right to legal remedies.

⁶ <http://www.shaber3.com/hirsizlikta-son-nokta-haberi/1283259/>

⁷ <http://www.gazetevatan.com/feto-nun-yurt-disi-okullari-yakin-markajda-1037127-gundem/>

⁸ <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/feto-nun-yurt-disi-okullari-yakin-gundem-2393170/>

According to the statement of Mustafa Çaltılı, “When we have a look at the countries where we took over the schools of FETÖ, we see that they are countries located in Africa. There isn’t any other school transfer made in other locations. There weren’t any transfers in the Turkic republics in Asia, nor in Balkans. We do not expect such thing to happen in USA and Europe anyway. We provide education in 22 countries, including the schools taken over from FETÖ in 12 countries, and established schools in the remaining countries to participate in the education system. ⁹

It seems that the Maarif Foundation, which represents the Republic of Turkey in their negotiations and is capable of seizing the schools belong to The Movement in the countries where there is no superiority of law thanks to the relationships of the politicians and administrators, bribes, and political pressure, finally realized that it is not possible to carry out unlawful activities in the countries where there is a working judicial system.

According to a statement in the media, Maarif Foundation signed a protocol with 25 countries in Africa, to have the schools of The Movement seized or closed down. Schools of The Movement were seized and transferred to the Maarif Foundation in 17 of these countries which are: **Guinea, Somalia, Niger, Sudan, Republic of Congo, Gambia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Mali, Mauritania, Chad, Burundi, and Comoros.**

i. Confiscation Incidents in Mauritania

8 schools of The Movement, which provide education in four buildings in two of the most important cities of **Mauritania**, were transferred to the Maarif Foundation together with more than 600 students.

ii. Confiscation Incidents in Senegal

9 schools providing education in three buildings in **Senegal** were seized by the Maarif Foundation. However, throughout the ongoing process, 9 schools of The Movement were returned back to their owners in Senegal.

⁹ <http://www.dunyabizim.com/etkinlik/28040/turkiye-maarif-vakfi-neler-yapiyor>

However, the schools of The Movement which were seized in Senegal by the Maarif Foundation, which was established for this sole purpose by the highly-motivated Erdoğan government to have the schools of The Movement closed down, were returned back to their original owners after the High Court verdict.

BBC published the news with the title “Small victory of the Gülen Movement in Senegal”, and stated that together with their management, 9 schools in question were returned back to Horizon Education.¹⁰

However, the administration of the Maarif Foundation, who couldn't manage to seize the schools of The Movement within the process, started to make every effort to have the schools closed down. They especially focused on having the settlement visas of the school employees cancelled and have them deported. Due to this fact, the settlement visas of many teachers, who have been providing education to the Senegalese children, were canceled or were not extended without any reason. Eventually, 12 institutions affiliated with The Movement in Senegal recently were closed down completely.¹¹

iii. Confiscation Incidents in Mali

As if **Mali**, there were 3297 students in 18 schools which belonged to The Movement. 18 schools which are located in five different complexes were transferred to the Maarif Foundation. There were 406 teachers, 373 Malian and 33 Turkish, on duty before the government interaction.

All of the schools located here were among the unlawfully seized by the Maarif Foundation, thanks to their intense diplomacy (!) initiatives.¹²

¹⁰ <http://www.tr724.com/senegalde-maarif-vakfinin-gasp-ettigi-9-turk-okulu-sahiplerine-geri-iade-edildi-simdi-egitime-baslamayi-bekliyor/>

¹¹ <https://ahvalnews.com/gulen-movement/senegal-closed-more-dozen-gulen-linked-schools>

¹² <http://www.star.com.tr/yazar/maarif-fetoyu-afrikadan-suruyor-yazi-1315513/>

iv. Confiscation Incidents in Mozambique

Officials from the Maarif Foundation and the other representatives of the politics of Erdoğan Government have been making efforts to have the schools to be seized or closed down in Mozambique for a while now. In this context, the committee of the Maarif Foundation requested the transfer of The Movement institutions to them by visiting the Ministry of National Education. Although the Ministry of National Education of Mozambique worked on this request, there isn't any unlawful decision taken just yet. Unfortunately, the Turkish Embassy makes propaganda towards The Movement schools to be transferred to the Maarif Foundation, and this situation effects the enrollments in the school in a bad way.

The Mozambican parents, who work for the state in high-level bureaucracy, stated that the Turkish officials offer serious amounts for bribing them in order to have the schools closed down, but such requests are being refused.

v. Confiscation Incidents in South Africa

Ministry of National Education and other official institutions in the Republic of South Africa are being contacted for unrealistic and defaming statements. Upon insistent invitations, the Minister of Education of the Republic of South Africa visited Turkey recently. Despite the fact that the country's democratic sense is expected not to allow such an unlawful action, the possibility of the representatives of the Erdoğan Government and the Maarif Foundation officials, who take advantage of the intense political conflicts, taking steps forward to have the schools closed down, should they cannot succeed seizing them.

vi. Confiscation Incidents in Chad

The then **Chad** Ambassador Ahmet Kanvas had targeted and made serious accusations against The Movement and its institutions after the corruption and bribe investigations, which is widely known as "17/25 December" where Tayyip Erdoğan and several ministers and bureaucrats were involved. Therefore, the unlawful interruptions suffered by The Movement had started way earlier than the Maarif Foundation, and they reached a peak in the last two years.

The Movement has been in service for the last 16 years in Chad, and many achievements towards education were embraced in this financially weak country with limited opportunities.

The State of Chad provided the necessary conveniences after witnessing the achievements of The Movement schools and their volunteers, thus helped the Chadians to benefit from the services even more. However, the Chad media revived the decisions of transferring all of the institutions in Chad to the Maarif Foundation, as a result of the assurances towards ending The Movement in Chad during the Turkey visit of the President of Chad in 3 November 2016.

Throughout the ongoing process, many different documents, which are not included in the normal procedure, were started to be requested from The Movement schools. Moreover, few articles were published on the website of Turkey's Chad Embassy, that The Movement schools would be closed down and transferred to the Maarif Foundation.

This situation caused the number of students in the schools to be decreased by 25%. Chad administration, who could not manage to act swiftly against the support of the people to the Movement schools, punished the schools to stop their education with the excuse of "illegal early enrollment" through the Ministry of National Education in Chad, after the heavy pressures of the Turkish state officials and the administration of Maarif Foundation in accordance with Erdoğan's hate politics. However, since it was revealed that this process was completed after the Maarif Foundation's unlawful persuading efforts by a few administrative managers and general managers without the knowledge of the Ministry of National Education, it was ruled that the schools to be reopened with the support of the Chad people for the 2017-2018 school year.

However, although the Movement schools and teachers won the hearts of the Chadian people, Erdoğan's hate politics, together with the widespread bribing in the countries where the culture is not advanced up to an acceptable level enough for Democracy and law, the activities of the schools are terminated in 8 December 2017, and the Minister of National Education signed the regulation that allowed the transfer of the administration of the school, which was disclosed to the school on 9 December by a committee. Turkish officials were evicted from the schools immediately, and Chad officials supervised inside the school for 10 days.

On 18 December, all of the representatives and the personnel on duty in the schools were ordered to leave Chad within the following 48 hours. Thus, hundreds of people, who provided education under extremely difficult conditions, were forced to leave Chad pell-mell and leave all their efforts and assets behind because of the hate politics operations Erdoğan carried out personally. All of the institutions of the Movement are currently seized by the Maarif Foundation.

Identifying the unlawful seizures and confiscations with the hands of the state with tears of joy is very thought-provoking towards demonstrating the current sociological erosion in Turkey. As a matter of fact, the words of Mustafa Kadioğlu, a writer of the partisan media which is financed by the Erdoğan Government, is very meaningful about wasting years of efforts of at one swoop after wax-lyrically explains the attacks against the Movement schools:

“It is very hopeful to see the Maarif Foundation taking everything away from FETÖ in just 1-1.5 years, which they have earned in 20 years...”¹³

4. Evaluation and Conclusion

It is clearly illustrated above that the case of Maarif Foundation raises serious concerns around violation of right to private property and education. It is not clear if the Foundation will be able to sustain the quality of education in the schools it forcefully takes over, which should be the main priority. The Maarif Foundation is founded with a special mission by the Turkish government which is to take over Hizmet affiliated schools that are planned to be shut down. In order to achieve their goal, Maarif Foundation officials with the help of Erdogan government have used methods that are clear violations of domestic and international law.

In the light of this information we kindly request all the local authorities to ask the questions below when deciding whether to hand over Turkish schools to the Maarif Foundation.

¹³ <http://www.star.com.tr/yazar/maarif-fetoyu-afrikadan-suruyor-yazi-1315513/>

1- How one can be sure that the Maarif Foundation that has been founded to take over Hizmet schools for the purpose of serving the Turkish government's and Erdogan's interests could be beneficial to the local community in the long-run? Is the Erdogan government's true goal to serve the educational needs of the local community? What will happen when the government changes after an election?

2- What is the financial situation of the Maarif Foundation? How transparent is it?

3- How one could be sure that Erdogan who has been using any opportunity (such as abusing a little girl's feelings) to serve his own Islamic agenda will not use these Maarif schools for the sake of his own political interests?

4- Will President Erdogan keep his promises regarding these schools whereas he has a track record of reversing his promises whenever he wants?

5- What will happen to the international reputation of those countries who collaborate with Erdogan government which earned a reputation as a corrupt and authoritarian state by human rights watchdog groups and international news agencies?

6- How a foundation that have no schools of its own in or out of Turkey could provide a good education?

7- Does the Maarif Foundation have any education experience regarding the country at stake?

8- What is the curriculum prepared by the Maarif Foundation to be taught in these schools in case of takeover and how much does it represent the national interests of the country at stake?

9- How could one be sure that the Maarif Foundation is able to maintain the level of education Hizmet schools, who have experience around the world, and have been providing education for decades?

10- How many of the teachers to be employed by the Maarif Foundation have teaching experience abroad?

11- How many of the teachers to be employed by the Maarif Foundation can speak and teach the native language of the country at stake? Moreover, how many of them can speak even English or French which are two of the most common languages used in education systems around the world?

12- Have you ever taken into account the reactions of the public and the legal problems that would arise in short and long run when handing over the schools, which have legally been giving education for years, to the Maarif Foundation in illicit ways?

