

MASSIVE EROSION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN TURKEY

The Turkish government's oppressive regime relentlessly continues despite all the efforts by the international community. Since 2013, the government has been targeting anti-government groups, mainly the Hizmet Movement, and the situation got worse after the so-called coup attempt in July 15, 2016. The government has no mercy in that even members of vulnerable groups such as women and children are jailed over baseless claims. This document briefly describes the current women's rights issues in Turkey aiming to provide an overview of the current crisis.

Especially after the attempted coup, the government has been taking dissidents collectively into custody, and then sending them to jail with no solid proof. In some cases, women are arrested and tortured in place of their male family members such as their fathers or husbands.¹ Because of their special needs, women constitute one of the groups that suffer the most from this oppression. Prison overcrowding is another serious problem. Inmates often sleep on the floor or by taking turns. Therefore, it is difficult to claim that prison conditions are suitable for women.² Turkey has only a few prisons specifically designed for women, meaning that most female detainees stay in prisons built for men.³ According to the latest CEDAW report, there are many allegations of sexual harassment and violence amounting to torture and ill treatment in prisons and these claims are not investigated properly.⁴ Women in prisons face various types of harassment, for instance, in many prisons, unnecessary and excessively intrusive strip searches are conducted by male personnel, and security cameras placed in rooms—including those in bathrooms—are monitored by male guardians. Detainees have only limited access to personal care and hygiene products, which are often at risk of confiscation during ward

¹ <https://stockholmcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Jailing-women-in-Turkey.pdf> p. 22-24.

² According to latest statistics, occupancy rate of Turkish prisons is 110.8%.

(<http://www.prisonstudies.org/country/turkey>) To solve this problem, the government has been resorting to ironically miserable solutions. For the purpose of making room for Hizmet followers, almost 34,000 prisoners were freed. (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkey-coup-attempt-latest-releases-almost-34000-prisoners-in-amnesty-amid-international-alarm-over-a7221451.html>). Moreover, the government has dedicated itself to building prisons. (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkey-coup-attempt-latest-releases-almost-34000-prisoners-in-amnesty-amid-international-alarm-over-a7221451.html>)

³ Stockholm Center for Freedom (SCF), *Jailing Women in Turkey Systematic Campaign of Persecution and Fear*, April 2017, available at <https://stockholmcf.org/report-on-violation-of-women-prisoners-rights-turkish-jails-turned-into-prisoners-camp/> <https://stockholmcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Jailing-women-in-Turkey.pdf>, p. 6.

⁴ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women - Turkey*, 25 July 2016, CEDAW/C/TUR/CO/7, available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/TUR/CO/7&Lang=En, para. 51-52.

searches.⁵ Female detainees are trying to make themselves heard by sending out letters, however, these letters do not appear in Turkish press as a result of censorship.⁶

Incarceration during pregnancy or shortly after giving birth is another issue that needs immediate attention. There are many instances where security officials wait at the door of hospital rooms once they are notified of the patients' registration to the hospital.⁷ Patients' medical conditions are not monitored and they are deprived of essential medication and dietary supplements. Mothers are not allowed to nurse their babies during custody and once they are arrested, their infant babies are also sent to jail. Currently, there are more than 700 children under the age of 6 (including infants) living in prisons.⁸

Violence against women is still an issue despite Turkey's supposed commitment to end it. As the CEDAW report indicates, relevant laws do not criminalize domestic violence and propose no procedures to prosecute offenders.⁹ Because of insufficient protection, many women have either been murdered or sexually harassed and perpetrators are not afraid of prosecution. Honor killings continue to be committed as well, even within well-educated families.¹⁰ More than 100 women have been victims of honor killings since 2010.¹¹

Education is another serious problem of Turkish women. The rate of literacy is quite low compared to men (illiteracy is more than five times more prevalent in women than in men),¹² because most families, especially in the east and south-east, do not allow their girls to go to school, but instead force them to marry under the age of 18. For university-educated women, on the other hand, the main problem is the alarming levels of gender inequality at work. Turkey ranks 131st among 144 countries in terms of gender equality.¹³

We briefly touched upon a few of the problems faced by women in Turkey. Many human rights reports have extensively explored the aforementioned problems and others. As the Advocates of Silenced Turkey, we urge every individual and authority to be aware of the worrisome situation of women in Turkey and take necessary steps urgently.

⁵ "Report on Violation of Women Prisoners' Rights: Turkish Jails Turned into 'Prisoners Camp'." *Stockholm Center for Freedom*, 15 Dec. 2017, available at stockholmcf.org/report-on-violation-of-women-prisoners-rights-turkish-jails-turned-into-prisoners-camp/.

⁶ Yilmaz, Zehra. "This Is How My Cellmate Tortured." *The Globe Post*, 25 Aug. 2017, available at theglobepost.com/2017/08/25/turkey-tortured-prison/.

⁷ SCF, *Jailing Women in Turkey*, 2017, p. 16-19.

⁸ "İki Aylık Akif Bebekle Birlikte Cezaevindeki Bebek Sayısı 705 Oldu." *Aktif Haber*, 24 April 2018, available at aktifhaber.com/gundem/iki-aylik-akif-bebekle-birlikte-cezaevindeki-bebek-sayisi-705-oldu-h115955.html.

⁹ CEDAW, para. 32.

¹⁰ CEDAW, para. 30, 34.

¹¹ *Kadın Cinayetleri*, accessed on 28 August 2018, kadincinayetleri.org/.

¹² Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), 2017 Statistics on the Status of Literacy, available at http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1018.

¹³ World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2017*, available at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf, p. 324.