

TURKEY'S MASSIVE CRACKDOWN ON HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS DEEPENED THE COUNTRY'S ALREADY ALARMING RECORDS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Following the coup attempt on the 15th of July 2016, dissident groups in Turkey are facing arguably their biggest crackdown in the country's history. The Turkish government under the authoritarian leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has taken a wave of oppressive actions against those that are perceived as critics of the regime.

The health industry is among the variety of industries that have been affected in association with those actions. Hospitals, medical schools and health clinics have been shut down. Thousands of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, scientific publishers and health authorities have been dismissed from their jobs. Many of those have been detained and/or arrested and are now serving prison sentences for baseless charges of belonging to what they call a "terrorist" group. Human rights organizations have also recently reported that arrested individuals have been subjected to severe torture and mistreatments.

The present report of the Stockholm Center for Freedom (SCF) provides an overview of key human rights concerns during the ongoing post-coup crack down on the Turkey's health industry, with a focus on the affected groups including health care professionals, patients, medical students, and shuttered institutions and organizations. Some of the highlights from the report are:

- **Dismissals of health care professionals:** With the combined figures of those who were dismissed from the civil service and those who lost their jobs after the government shut down their institutions, the total number of health care professionals including doctors, academics, nurses, mid-wives, and hospital staff who were laid off has reached more than 21,000. Of those, a total of 5,261 are medical doctors and academics who specialize in the medical sciences:

- 1,697 academics who worked in state-run medical schools and universities were summarily and abruptly dismissed with the government's decree laws.

- 1,684 physicians who worked for the Ministry of Health were purged.

-More than **1,200 doctors** in the private sector suddenly became unemployed when the government shut down hospitals, medical centers and health clinics.

-**675** academics who teach medical sciences lost their jobs after the closure of the Gülen movement-linked universities.

- **Jailed health care professionals:** The government has never publicized the figures of how many health care professionals have been detained, arrested or currently in prison. However, SCF's monitoring Turkey's media outlets suggesting the estimated figure is in the thousands. The report provides numerous cases that portray the magnitude of how ruthless Turkish authorities have become in targeting real or perceived critics. Three selected cases from the report are:

- Mustafa Emmiler:** A 47-year-old professor, who was detained on August 15 of 2016 on charges of alleged links to the Gülen movement. Dr. Emmiler is a prominent figure in cardiovascular surgery and the receiver of the "Doctor of the Year" award from the Ministry of Health in 2013.

- Haluk Savaş:** a prominent 51-year-old psychiatry professor at Gaziantep University, who was arrested on September 28 of 2016 on charges of "terrorism." He was a nominee for a parliamentary seat from the main opposition, Republican People's Party (CHP).

- Murat Acar:** the Harvard-educated Turkish professor who was extradited to Turkey on an arrest warrant issued by the Turkish government through Interpol even though he was under UN protection in Bahrain. Dr. Acar was subjected to torture and ill treatment for 18 days after his extradition to Turkey.

- **Suspicious deaths of health care professionals:** Suspicious deaths in Turkey have increased during the aftermath of the coup attempt, of which most occur in Turkish jails and detention centers where torture and mistreatment are executed. In most cases, authorities declared them to be suicides without any effective, independent or through investigation. SCF has documented such cases where victims were health care professionals. Two selected cases from the report are:

- Sevgi Balcı:** A 37-year old nurse who was a mother of three fired by government decree in October of 2016, committed suicide by hanging herself in Isparta province. It was reportedly due to not being reinstated to her job.

- Ali Özer:** a 48-year-old doctor who was jailed on charges of his suspected links to the Gülen movement, died allegedly due to heart attack in Çorum Prison on March 23 of 2017.

- **Turkish health care professionals in exile:** The rising authoritarianism in Turkey has enforced health care professionals to escape the country, sometimes even through illegal

migrant routes. However, they still face endangerment in their new homes as they take on new challenges such as having difficult time finding jobs and securing recognition of their medical licenses. Advocators of Erdogan harass individuals in which they receive threats from Turkish government proxies. Exiled doctors have reported that they are fearful of their families in Turkey who might face persecution because of their beliefs.

- **Shuttered hospital, medical centers, pharmacies, charities:**

- In 2016, the Turkish government has shut down 14 hospitals and 36 medical centers on the pretext of alleged ties to the Gülen movement. They were issued by simple decree-laws without any administrative or judicial probes.

- On a similar pretext, 400 pharmacies across Turkey renounced access to the electronic prescription system of the Social Security Institution (SGK), an act meant to force these pharmacies to go bankrupt overnight. In addition to that, nearly 1500 pharmacies are under investigation as the media outlets in Turkey recently reported.

- A UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) partnered charity organization, Kimse Yok Mu has similarly been shut down in 2016. The charity organization had been active for many years and delivered emergency relief in disaster zones, provided health care services and helped rebuilding infrastructure in various communities across 113 countries.

- **Patients:** Patients were left in distraught as multiple medical centers and hospitals were shut down. As before, given the shortage of hospitals and staff members, many patients are unable to receive medical help. This forced some patients to seek medical treatments in other provinces. On the other hand, Turkish government deliberately violates adequate access to health care and medical treatments to those prisoned patients. The situation aggregated for those in solitary confinement as opposed to the European Prison Rules. The report provides numerous cases for patients in detention facilities and prisons. Four of those cases from the report are:

- Gökhan Açikkollu:** A 42-year-old history teacher with type 1 Diabetes was detained on July 24 of 2016 and held in police custody for 13 days before he fell ill. He was questioned allegedly under torture and abuse until he developed health problems again and was taken back to the hospital only to be pronounced dead.

- Yavuz Bölek:** A 49-year-old police officer, father of three was arrested on August 25 of 2016 despite being in a critical stage of colon cancer. Bölek continues to be kept in prison given his severe health circumstances backed by the medical reports.

- Tuğba Yıldız:** A mother of three was detained on January 15, 2017 in Tekirdağ province. During a 24-day long police detention, she had been tortured and mistreated before she eventually developed symptoms of a psychological disorder to the extent of losing her

sanity, as revealed by the doctor reports. And yet the court ruled for the arrest of Yıldız and sent her to prison, where she has been incarcerated ever since.

-**Nurhayat Yıldız:** This 14-week-old-pregnant woman had been imprisoned with her alleged ties to the Gülen movement. After reviewing her medical reports, her plead to be released had been denied. She was kept in a crowded cell with 24 inmates where she suffered a miscarriage on October 6 of 2016. After receiving two days of hospital treatments, she was thrown back in jail. Yıldız's situation portrays one of the many cases where inhuman treatments executed toward pregnant women who are forced to be in jail both during their pregnancy and immediately after giving birth.

- **Medical students:** Following the failed coup attempt, medical students have also been negatively impacted. Many students who are enrolled in the medical schools that have been shut down, were forced to partake in other universities across Turkey. There are cases where medical students have been subjected to persecution or even imprisonment of alleged ties to the Gülen movement. Details following such situations are provided within the report.

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