

THE TORTURED MOTHERS UNDER ERDOGAN'S REGIME

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"I was so afraid to go to the hospital for delivery. I had planned to have the majority of my labor contractions at home so that I would not be taken into custody," says Ayse Kaya in an interview she gave to an Advocates of Silenced Turkey reporter. Like many mothers of the Gulen movement, Ayse Kaya's life took a radical turn after the so-called coup attempt in Turkey, in 2016. Mrs. Kaya, who is a Gulen movement supporter, used to work at a non-profit organization. Mrs. Kaya mentions in her interview that the organization was completely legal, operating under the appropriate government department that oversaw non-profit organizations, and subject to unannounced government audits.

The Turkish Justice Minister data indicates that there are more than 750 babies imprisoned with their mothers. According to the Turkish Criminal Code, Law No# 5275, Article 16, Section 4 the Implementation of Criminal and Security Measures prohibits the arrest of women with babies younger than six months and pregnant women.

However, these regulations do not apply to Gulen movement supporters. This brutality is not limited to new moms, and newborns; it is also affecting the new generation of Turkey. There are more than 3000 children in the prisons of Turkey. This growing young generation has witnessed many tortures, and brutal practices in the jails, and at the courts. During this process, one can easily witness a child screaming, or crying uncontrollably as they see their parents in handcuffs. Some of the mothers have to take their newborns to prison with them, while others have to leave them in tears to their parents.

Worst of all, there are many children whose mother and father were imprisoned and due to their relatives' unwillingness to accept guardianship, these children were sent to the orphanages. The link below shows a short video of a little girl whose father is in jail, and whose mother was taken to court and arrested. After many hours of waiting, the little girl is talking to a dog asking where her mother is.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gni2GbSpoZA>

As of now, there is no evidence that connects Gulen supporters to the attempted 2016 coup. However, for Erdogan, and the AKP regime, this does not mean anything. In his article, Tas (2017) states, "Having thwarted a coup attempt, one could plausibly assume that AKP would comb through the evidence gathered and reveal the truth of 15 July. Instead, AKP demonstrated an apparent disdain for facts and employed various means to obstruct the pursuit of truth and maintain its monopoly over the narrative of the abortive coup." (p.6) Even if we consider that the Gulen movement followers organized the coup, there is no law that allows imprisoning new mothers and newborns. No matter what the truth is, there is one reality that is not changing; Turkey's prisons are turning into the headquarters of torture for the new generations of Turkey.

Like Mrs. Kaya, there are many mothers living in brutal conditions in the prisons of Turkey without - knowing the exact reason for their imprisonment. They are living with the hope that all of this is a big misunderstanding, and that the authorities would eventually realize that they were making a big mistake. Even though we share the same hopes with these new mothers, the present status of the Erdogan regime has not made any attempt to release them despite the danger of the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides all the trauma and brutality, the mothers are facing, there is another crucial unforeseen fact, which is the psychological status of new mothers. The delivery process brings many crucial identity, physiological, and physical shifts in a woman's life. "These changes range from "baby blues" to a spectrum of feelings known as "postpartum mood disorders". ("Emotions of Motherhood", n.d, p.0).

Besides the poor psychological and physical conditions in prisons, most mothers suffer from deprivations such as not having hygienic enough conditions, and the lack of baby diapers, baby formula, and attention to the nutritional needs of their newborns.

In addition to the mothers in jails, due to unforeseen conditions, many women are forced to live in secret locations with the fear of being taken into custody or imprisoned. Most of these women have been suffering from the lack of access to proper healthcare, and from starvation, and poverty. Today, many Gulen movement supporters are forced into civil death with their families, and many ended up with emigrating from Turkey via dangerous water crossing from Meric (Evros River) with the hope of finding new lives overseas.

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