

# URGENT CALL TO ACTION: PREVENT THE RISK OF MASS DEATH IN TURKEY'S PRISONS

The notoriously overcrowded prisons in Turkey pose serious health threats to inmates during the coronavirus pandemic. This is indicated in the complaints we received from the inmates' relatives. Also, it is supported by the written and oral statements of the other inmate relatives as well as the reporting of the human rights activists and organizations. The recently passed execution bill is, unfortunately, not able to eliminate those threats due to its unfair and discriminatory nature. On May 13, 2020, an audio recording hit social media. Not only was its content confirmed by its source, but also other inmate relatives expressed similar claims as in the recording. All these point to that the inmates' rights to life – which is among the most basic and universal human rights and is protected by the 10th amendment of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey and the article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) – are under clear, serious, and near threat as asserted by the inmates themselves.

*May 8, 2020: In the B12 cell of Silivri prison no. 7, inmate Huseyin Kacan's examination request was refused by officials despite him repeatedly saying that "we are not feeling okay, conduct testing on us". There are 39 inmates in the B12 cell. It is claimed that the prison administration did not deal with the inmates despite the coronavirus symptoms seen on April 25. Although the seriousness of the situation was understood after a 48-year old inmate fainted, no tests were applied. After the relatives of those staying at the cell called Alo 184, the national emergency number, the Ministry of Health sent first responders to the prison for testing. The testing was conducted on May 6, 2020 and the test results were released on May 7, 2020. According to the results obtained from the e-nabiz (the ministry's health portal), everyone in the cell tested positive. Nevertheless, the prison administration takes no action for those inmates. They are not doing anything for their treatment. D, whose husband is in the B-12 cell, wants to remain anonymous because she is worried about the health of her husband's parents who have heart disease. After learning that her 39-year old husband tested positive for Covid-19, D described what has happened to the Arti Gercek news:*

"After I learned about the cases in the cell C-7, I was worried and asked him about their situation. He said 'On Monday, they took away two friends from the cell and never brought them back, I think they tested positive. As a matter of fact, we all fell ill, it was like a flue, some have thrown up'. I asked if they were tested: 'Forget testing, we are given only a small amount of soup for both sahur and iftar. The situation is so desperate. The first time we were given masks was when I was taken to the phone call', (my husband) told". Ekrem Solmaz, the father of Yasin Solmaz, another inmate from the C-7 cell, also found out last night that his son's Covid-19 test was positive.

*May 15, 2020: Being among the coronavirus risk group, journalist Çetin Çiftçi, who was sentenced to 6 years and 3 months in prison and has been in Sincan prison for 8 months, was diagnosed with Covid-19. Çiftçi, who also has kidney and heart problems, was reportedly under treatment.*

*May 14, 2020: Stating the huge jump in the number of the coronavirus cases in Silivri prison, HDP Deputy Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu said that 45 inmates stay in cells with a capacity of 7. Gergerlioğlu also shared some letters from the inmate relatives and inmates themselves. Here are a few listed below:*

"Z. A. stays in Silivri prison no. 5. In a phone call with his mother; he said that he had been taken to the infirmary twice, and then a sample was taken from him in a requested ambulance. He had not been informed about why the sample was taken, and he had been sent back to his cell without being taken to a hospital."

"My brother stays in Silivri prison no.2. He had said in our call last week that they were given such little food. We are so worried about my brother's life, given the coronavirus threat. He is staying with 44 other inmates in a cell that has a capacity of 7 and the food service was so problematic due to the releases from the open prisons."

"In Silivri prison no. 7, there are 43 inmates in the cells. The coronavirus outbreak spreads into the prison. Some 30 inmates have shown symptoms like diarrhea and vomiting. For the last several weeks, there has been a shortage in the prison's canteen service, inmates are denied access to soap, shampoo, and napkins. They are forced to take a shower in cold water with dishwashing soap (due to the lack of provision of hot water)."

"At the C-7 cell of Silivri prison no. 7, unfortunately, an inmate was tested positive for Covid-19. The remaining 45 inmates in the cell are at greater risk. We are so worried about its spread to the other inmates in the cell."

"M.E. stays in Silivri L type prison no. 5. As per his family, the inmate stated that he has a dry coughing problem which is among the coronavirus symptoms. There are inmates in his cell with chronic diseases. They are denied access to personal hygiene materials. There is a shortage in the regular provision of cold and hot water. They are uninformed about the pandemic. The hygiene and proper cleaning of the dining halls are not adequate and no social distancing rules are being implemented. The food being served is unhealthy and improper and a quarantine room is not available in the prison."

"My brother stays in Silivri prison no. 8. When we talked to our brother, he said that there were patients he is in physical contact with that tested positive for Covid-19. Their request for testing was refused by the prison administration. He also said that they are staying in overcrowded cells. We are worried about my brother's life. At my brother's request, we ask for testing to be conducted."

*May 15, 2020: Şakire Solmaz, the wife of ex-cadet Yasin Solmaz who has been sentenced to prison for life, M.T., the partner of teacher M.T., B. Çicek, the wife of ex-police officer Ali Çiçek, and Fatih Çiçek, Ali Çiçek's uncle and attorney, stated what they have been through during the last week. They shared with Bold Medya their relatives' Covid-19 diagnosis reports obtained from (the Ministry of Health's health portal) e-Nabız and the petitions that they submitted to the courts for their release.*

*“They avoid us like the plague, no one is here to help”, said Şakire Solmaz, the wife of Yasin Solmaz. Being locked up for 42 months, Ali Çiçek stays at the B10 cell of Silivri prison no. 7. His wife, B. Çiçek said “He rested for two days with a high fever. But he said he is fine now. Yet, the cell conditions are so bad. Foodservice is problematic. He said he has never seen such little food being served before. They were buying breakfast products from the prison canteen, but it is closed now. There is always a queue for the restroom. There is even a queue for the fridge, the living conditions got heavier. It is so crowded there, even if someone feels okay, the others who are not feeling okay affect him”.*

*Another inmate staying at the B12 cell of the prison no. 7 is teacher M.T. Being locked up for 19 months, M.T. was diagnosed with Covid-19. Having not seen her husband for 65 days, and stating that a week amounts to a year for her since May 6, his wife M.T. talked about her phone call with her husband: “Last time I spoke to my husband was on Wednesday, two days ago. Since May 6, a week has felt like a year. Because it is recorded in the health portal that he was taken to see a doctor, I asked him what is happening. He said there is no such thing. We were only tested (for Covid-19). Since then, no one has bothered to see us. They are putting such records in the system to make it look like they are monitoring us. They are only checking their temperature. They are not taking them to the doctor, but they (falsely) put records in the system showing that they are taking. They are in danger there. Not only do their immune systems get weakened but also they are not isolated. In fact, how can you isolate them in a place where 39 people stay! This is against the law. Moreover, the food service is so problematic. He said no vegetables or fruits have been served for the last two weeks. They are only given a very small amount of food. He said, ‘we were left here to die, no one is coming to check on us.’ He asked to seek help from whomever/wherever I can.”*

The issues stated above clearly show that the Government of Turkey and the officials are not taking the necessary measures amid the global Coronavirus outbreak. They do not even provide the essential basic needs of those inmates whose well-beings and health are under their responsibility to protect. Not only that, but it is also clearly seen that they also fail to ensure physical conditions necessary to prevent the transmission of the disease, and that mass deaths can occur in prisons due to the “mass isolation” measures that are similar to the medieval practices.

*April 8, 2020: It is claimed that a convict named Mehmet Yeter in Bafra prison, who reportedly had diabetes, was recently sent back to prison after his leg got amputated and three days later, he died from Covid-19. Despite the statement of the Bafra Public Prosecutor's Office that Mehmet Yeter's death was not related to Covid-19, a social media user called Ferhat Yeter, who declared himself as Mehmet Yeter's son, shared some documents, that allegedly belonged to the public prosecutor, about the funeral proceedings of his father Mehmet Yeter.*

*April 20, 2020: Izmir Public Prosecutor's Office announced that an inmate in Buca prison has tested positive for the novel coronavirus.*

*April 22, 2020: After the first coronavirus case in Buca prison, Izmir Public Prosecutor's Office announced that 64 more inmates have also tested positive.*

*April 28, 2020: Konya Public Prosecutor's Office announced that 55 inmates in Konya E type prison have tested positive for the coronavirus.*

*May 2, 2020: After receiving complaint letters from inmates and their relatives, Sezgin Tanrikulu, CHP Istanbul Deputy and Vice President of the Parliamentary Human Rights Investigation Committee, stated that they are receiving an unprecedented number of complaints, and most of them are about "inadequate access to nutrition, hygiene, and health care service".*

*May 8, 2020: Bakırköy Public Prosecutor's Office announced that 44 prisoners in Silivri prison have tested positive for Covid-19.*

The significant differences between the official statements and the information received from the inmates' relatives and their attorneys indicate that the extent of the coronavirus risk in Turkey's prisons is far deeper than what has been announced. The Government of Turkey and officials, who are not taking the necessary precautions to protect the rights to life of those who are under their responsibility, in slightest terms, act with "severe neglect of duty and culpable negligence".

We, a coalition of organizations concerned about human rights in Turkey, call on all national and international institutions and the general public, especially the Turkish Government, to act immediately and effectively to stop the aggravated coronavirus threats in Turkey's prisons and prevent possible mass deaths from happening. Before it is too late, with no further loss of lives.

Respectfully,



Hafza Girdap  
*Executive Director*  
Advocates of Silenced Turkey  
(USA)  
<http://silencedturkey.org>



Gabriel Seisedos  
*President*  
PEN Argentina and Economic Equity  
(Argentina)  
<https://pen-international.org/centres/argentinian-centre>



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Katrina Lantos Swett".

Katrina Lantos Swett  
*President*  
The Lantos Foundation  
(USA)  
<https://www.lantosfoundation.org/>



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joyce M. Davis".

Joyce M. Davis  
*President/CEO*  
World Affairs Council of Harrisburg  
(USA)  
[wacharrisburg.org](http://wacharrisburg.org)



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mehmet Saral".

Mehmet Saral  
*President*  
Advocates for Dignity  
(Australia)  
<https://www.advocatesfordignity.org.au/>



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rehana Khan Parker".

Rehana Khan Parker  
*President*  
Social Justice and Advocacy Campaign  
(South Africa)  
<http://sojac.org.za/>



Alliance *for*  
Shared Values

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alp Aslandogan".

Dr. Alp Aslandogan  
*Executive Director*  
Alliance for Shared Values  
(USA)  
<https://afsv.org>



HUDDLED MASSES

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Isaac Gold".

Dr. Isaac Gold  
*Executive Director*  
Huddled Masses Inc.  
(USA)  
[www.huddledm.org](http://www.huddledm.org)

**MORE<sup>2</sup>**



Lora McDonald  
*Executive Director*  
Metro Organization For Racial  
(USA)  
<https://www.more2.org/>



Mehmet Kilic  
*President*  
Journalists and Writers Foundation  
(USA)  
<http://jwf.org>



Kiran Nazish  
*Founding Director*  
Coalition for Women in Journalism  
<https://womeninjournalism.org/>



Akif Aydin  
*President*  
Advocates for Justice and Human Rights  
(USA)  
<http://advocateshumanrights.org/>



U.S. AFFILIATE OF INTERNATIONAL PHYSICIANS FOR THE PREVENTION OF NUCLEAR WAR



Ann Suellentrop M.S R.N.  
*Project Director*  
Physicians for Social Responsibility  
(USA)  
<https://www.psr.org/>



Atilla Dag  
*Director-General*  
Universal Rights Association  
(South Africa)  
<http://uniras.org>



**Verein Verfolgt**  
Aktion für verfolgte Menschen aus der Türkei



Fatma Karaagac  
*Member of Board*  
Verein Verfolgt - Aktion für geflüchtete Menschen aus der Türkei (Switzerland)  
<https://vereinverfolgt.ch>