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Enforced disappearances in Turkey: The Case of Hüseyin Galip Küçüközyiğit

Following the coup attempt of July 15, 2016, the Turkish government declared a state of emergency paving the way for a crackdown on political opponents which has ultimately led to gross violations of civil rights and liberties of Turkish citizens.

The Turkish government has revoked passports and aggressively petitioned for the arrest and deportation of dissenters overseas including individuals under UN protection. Abductions, forced disappearances and renditions of dissenters are among the long list of atrocious crimes committed by the Turkish government. The Turkish state has even conducted cross-border operations by brazenly abducting its citizens from other countries. This is not only an offense against the national sovereignty of countries where these covert operations are conducted, but also an egregious insult to international human rights laws. There is also ample evidence to suggest that once dissenters are abducted, they undergo extensive torture and suffer physical and emotional trauma at the hands of their unidentified abductors. They are not informed of the charges brought against them as they are apprehended and are deprived of their due process rights. Some of these abducted individuals face trial after being subjected to months of torture if they are lucky enough to survive the horrifying ordeal. The Turkish government has rarely repudiated claims of such horrific acts and illegalities committed against dissenters. On the contrary, these inhumane practices are lauded amongst national intelligence agencies and government officials. Stories of dissenters being viciously abducted in front of their families are boasted of by sycophant media outlets who cheer for and commend the brutal acts of the government.

On December 29, 2020 a new allegation of enforced disappearance in Turkey about Hüseyin Galip Küçüközyiğit, a former civil servant dismissed from his job by an emergency decree, was reported. His daughter, Nursena Küçüközyiğit, has been trying to file a criminal complaint saying that her father was abducted, however, authorities in the northwestern city of Kocaeli, notably the public prosecutor's office and the police department, refused to receive the complaint.

Last Contact With The Abductee

Küçüközyiğit last spoke with his daughter Nursena on the phone on December 29 at around 3:30 p.m. His coworkers were the last people to have seen him. About 4 p.m. he left his office to visit a friend in Ankara's Gölbaşı district, by a Mazda 323 with license plate 34 FNF 28. His cell phone stopped receiving signals at 4:23 pm.

Nursena Küçüközyiğit says her father was unemployed for a long time after being expelled from public service and was held in detention for six months for his alleged links with Gülen Movement. After he was released, he set up a business to offer legal advice to other purged public sector workers, which ,Nursena believes might have been the reason her father to be abducted.

Similarities with Other Abduction Incidents

Kucukozyigit was a civil servant like many other victims of the recent abduction cases. Almost all abductions occurred at public places while the abductee was about to leave from an acquainted location. After months of their disappearances, victims resurfaced under police detention and were arrested immediately. Also almost in all cases, police officers and public prosecutors have been hesitant to open a case in spite of the clear and concrete evidence of a crime.

Growing Number of Cases of Abductions with Black Transporters

In many of the disappearances, a black transport vehicle is used, according to the eyewitnesses and CCTV footages. A group of masked men, believed to be the members of the Turkish intelligence agency, are grabbing the victims and pulling them into a black transporter van and disappear swiftly.

Almost all of the victims of these enforced disappearances resurfaced months after they went missing in bruises and traumatized. Some have spoken out in court, recounting the systematic and severe torture they were subjected to during their secret interrogation by the National Intelligence Organization (MİT), The victims also have reported that they were kept until their wounds got healed to be handed over to the police.

According to the testimonies of former MİT directors Erhan Pekçetin and Aydın Günel, who were captured by Syrian Kurdish militants in 2017 while they were in a covert operation in northern Syria, all abducted people that have affiliations with the Hizmet movement were tortured and interrogated in a building in the capi-

tal city of Turkey, Ankara¹.

Nursena thinks her father is yet another victim of the enforced disappearances and she is worried that he might be subject to torture. She says she has reached CCTV footages displaying that Galip Kucukozyigit was followed by three suspicious men on the day he disappeared but she was not able to convince a prosecutor to open an investigation.

According to Kucukozyigit's daughter Nursena, Turkish police are not willing to search for evidence against her father's kidnapping. The only answer she could get from the police is: "We are unable to provide any information." Families of other victims were also faced with the same attitude by the police, who were reluctant to investigate and collect evidence. The United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances in its reports emphasized that the Turkish authorities were not pursuing the necessary investigative tracks. Detailed information about and full list of enforced disappearances of Turkish nationals can be found in AST's report, *Erdogan's Long Arms: Abductions In Turkey And Abroad*².

Forced disappearances and abductions are an assault on human rights as established by the Convention on the Forced Disappearance of Persons. According to Advocates for Silenced Turkey (AST)'s report³, there have been 135 abductions and forced disappearances to date; this report consists of an alarming number of accounts of abductions and torture provided by abductees. AST calls on international human rights organizations to urge Turkish authorities to abide by domestic and international laws of human rights and cease their illegal and inhumane practices of abductions, forced disappearance and renditions immediately.



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¹ "MIT Officials Confess Turkey's Relations with ISIS and Al Nusra." ANF News, 23 Jan.2018, anfenglish.com/news/mit-officials-confess-turkey-s-relations-with-isis-and-al-nusra-24382.

² <https://silencedturkey.org/erdogans-long-arms-abductions-in-turkey-and-abroad>

³ <https://silencedturkey.org/erdogans-long-arms-abductions-in-turkey-and-abroad>

Relevant Human Rights Institutions

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United National Human Rights Committee

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Committee Against Torture

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