



Global Human Rights Defence

Turkey Report

October 2020

Turkey has been experiencing a deepening human rights crisis over the past four years with a dramatic erosion of its rule of law and democracy framework. The latter also reflects in the institutional racism against non-Muslims and other non-Turic ethnic minorities such as Kurds, Armenians, and Greeks.

Turkey's protection of minority groups continues to fall remarkably short of European and other international standards. It can be said that Turkey is practicing the policy of Turkification, which is a practice of cultural assimilation that fails to recognize individuals' rights to ethnic, national and religious self-identification and that aims at forced assimilation with a Turkish identity.

By enforcing these practices, Turkey violates the internationally guaranteed standards for minority rights, such as impeding their freedom of religion, freedom of speech, limiting political participation, and practicing or tolerating various other forms of direct and indirect discrimination.

Also, in October, various human rights have been violated by Turkey;

- The mistreatment of Kurds in Turkey is under the spotlight again following allegations of torture and food poisoning. Three politicians from the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) who were recently arrested said they were hospitalized with food poisoning during their detention.
- Water is the basic need of every human being, even with that knowledge, in October, for the 13th time, Turkey has cut off the water supply from Hasakah (northeast Syria).
- On the 22nd of October, a Turkish court convicted freelance journalist Sabiha Temizkan of "making terrorist propaganda" and sentenced her to 15 months in prison for a tweet made in 2014.
- At least 43 women were murdered in Turkey by men between last October and early November.

This report is intended to raise awareness of the situation of minorities in Turkey and encourage constructive policy change by national and international bodies.

Discrimination Against Minorities

Life for Syrian refugees and Kurds is becoming increasingly violent



A spate of attacks in Turkey on Syrian refugees and internal Kurdish migrants, and displaced people in recent months have put both communities on edge. In July, a Syrian teenager working as a market seller in Bursa, northwestern Turkey, died after being attacked by a group of men.

Another Syrian teenager who worked in a bakery in Samsun, another northern province, was killed during a fight in the street in September. His brother, who witnessed it, said it was a racist attack.

The same weekend, a young Kurdish man from Van working in construction in western Turkey was shot dead, and two of his friends were wounded. A week earlier, members of a Kurdish family from Mardin employed as seasonal agricultural workers in Sakarya, a Turkish province where Kurds are frequently targeted, told reporters they had been verbally humiliated and physically attacked by a local group of Turkish men.

These recent attacks against both Syrian refugees and Kurds reveal how Turkey's authoritarian and aggressive regime's nationalist policies are influencing perceptions and attitudes towards non-Turkish minorities – with devastating consequences.

Fresh allegations about mistreatment of Kurds in Turkey



The mistreatment of Kurds in Turkey is under the spotlight again following allegations of torture and food poisoning.

Three politicians from the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) who were recently arrested said they were hospitalized with food poisoning during their detention.

The government accuses the HDP of ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and thousands of its members have been prosecuted for the same reason, including its leaders. The HDP denies such links. The PKK is designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the European Union, and the US.

The HDP politicians, including Ayhan Bilgen, mayor of Van province, fell ill after eating food served at Ankara police headquarters.

Bilgen was not immediately taken to hospital, nor was he allowed to talk to his legal team until after HDP lawmakers had talked with government officials to have him hospitalized.

The trio are under arrest as part of a probe into violent protests that took place in Kobane in 2014. Their detention period was extended on Monday by another four days.

Amnesty International has urged the government to investigate allegations that two Kurds, aged 55 and 50, were thrown from a military helicopter in Van. The rights group voiced its concerns about the "allegations of torture and mistreatment," which it said were unacceptable under international human rights law and standards that Turkey was obliged to comply with.

The men alleged to have been thrown out of a military helicopter were arrested on the 11th of September as part of an operation against the PKK. Both were hospitalized and had signs of heavy beatings on their bodies.

One of the men was shown to the media with a bloodied face. He is experiencing memory loss. The other man's condition remains critical. He is suffering from brain trauma, broken ribs, a punctured lung and has been in intensive care for more than two weeks.

Relatives of the villagers have demanded justice and the uncovering of the truth through a proper investigation.

Amnesty International wants Turkey to investigate the case impartially, and the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), has submitted a parliamentary question about the allegations of torture.

HDP lawmaker Ali Kenanoglu said his party would follow up the mistreatment allegations at a domestic and international level.

“Kurds have become the scapegoat of the current regime because they are considered as the easiest target that does not have any strong social support behind it,” he told Arab News. “Currently, all policies involving war and violence are conducted by targeting Kurds. The mistreatment regarding this segment of society has not received strong backing so far, which opens more room for such efforts.”

Source: Arab news

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1741561/middle-east>

Turkey hits Kurds in northern Syria with a cruel weapon: water



Near the town of Ras Al-Ain in Hasakah, in northeastern Syria, empty jerry cans were piled high on the roadside, where women and their restless children waited in the blistering heat for trucks to bring water to their parched community. Just a few days earlier, Turkish occupation forces had once again cut off the water supply from the Alouk pumping station, five kilometers away.

This critical facility supplies drinking water to nearly 1 million people in Hasakah. Without it, the province goes thirsty.

"We had no water for a month," recalled Ahmed Zubair, 22, who works at a local phone shop. "Without water, we cannot protect ourselves against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). This is a reason for the spread of disease because there is not enough water for cleaning, only for drinking. This is a danger for children and society in general."

Xelil Osman, a local delivery driver, said: "We were delivering water to the people with trucks. The water situation is terrible, and we always worry it will not be enough for the people. If there is water, we deliver it. But if there is none, we have nothing to deliver."

"Turkey has cut off the water supply from Hasakah 13 times this year, according to the UN, in order to exert political pressure on the NES.

"Most recently, the whole Hasakah region spent two weeks in the sweltering August heat totally without water, and some neighborhoods spent over two months without a drop of water being delivered."

As COVID-19 cases rise and temperatures remain high, all efforts to reopen the Alouk pumping station have failed. Meanwhile, the Kurdish Red Crescent and other aid agencies have struggled to find alternative water sources for the region.

The Al-Himme Water Station offers a partial solution for now. "However, it does not cover more than 25 percent of the people's needs," said Bassam Al-Ahmad, director of Syrians for Truth and Justice, a non-governmental organization working on documenting human rights violations in Syria.

Pressing for justice, local aid agencies say Turkey has not only broken international humanitarian law by denying Hasakah access to running water but has committed a war crime. They say that since the water-pumping stations and dams of northeastern Syria are located near the front lines, their protection is vital for the local population's well-being.

"According to international humanitarian law and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to cut the water supply to a civilian population is a crime against humanity and a war crime," Sara Montinaro, a lawyer and project manager for the Kurdish Red Crescent, told Arab News.

Source: Arab news

Turkey locks up Kurdish mayors



In cities across Turkey's east, it is no longer an unusual scene. The local mayor, clutching a bag stuffed with some clothes and a toothbrush, the bare necessities for a long spell in prison, emerges from his house before dawn, accompanied by a group of policemen, and disappears into a van. The scene played out most recently on the 25th of September in Kars, a city near the Armenian border, where police arrested Ayhan Bilgen, who was elected to office last year. A small crowd gathered to say goodbye. "Kars is proud of you," the chanting began. Dozens of other members of Turkey's most prominent Kurdish party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (hdp), including three former parliamentarians, were rounded up the same day.

Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, believes he is close to burying the dream of Kurdish autonomy both inside and outside the country's borders. The army has dealt Kurdish insurgents, known as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a series of heavy blows. State prosecutors have crippled Kurdish politics through the courts. Sixty-five mayors were elected on the hdp's ticket in local elections last year. At least 59 of them have been forced out of the office or locked up, or both

Source: [economist](https://www.economist.com/europe/2020/10/17/turkey-locks-up-kurdish-mayors)
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Freedom Speech

Journalist rights watchdog urges Turkey to 'stop harassing journalist.'



The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has urged Turkey to "stop harassing journalists and prosecuting them on trumped-up charges," following a series of "baseless and harassing" charges against reporters.

The NGO, which is dedicated to protecting journalists' rights and free expression worldwide, highlighted several recent court cases involving reporters in the country.

On Thursday the 22th of October, a Turkish court convicted freelance journalist Sabiha Temizkan of "making terrorist propaganda" and sentenced her to 15 months in prison for a tweet made in 2014.

She tweeted a news headline about the fall of an Iraqi town to Daesh and said that she forgot to add the story's link. The court argued that the story's headline violated the law.

On Wednesday, the day before Temizkan's sentencing, another Istanbul court rejected an appeal by exiled journalist Can Dündar, which allowed the authorities to seize his assets held in Turkey.

Two Bloomberg reporters face trial in the coming days, the CPJ said, alongside three other journalists and 33 co-defendants.

They will face charges of sharing "false, wrong or deceptive information" to affect the markets and face possible jail terms of five years.

Bloomberg is a media organization dedicated to covering financial news and market movements worldwide.

"The Turkish authorities persist in filing baseless and harassing charges against journalists for doing their jobs," Gulnoza Said, CPJ's Europe and Central Asia program coordinator, said in New York. The charges "are purely retaliatory" and "must be dropped immediately."

"None of these journalists has committed any crime, let alone sharing terrorist propaganda, spreading false information about the economy or any other ludicrous charge authorities may try to cook up."

Turkey is notorious for its harsh treatment of journalists and constraints on free speech. It ranks 154 out of 180 on Reporters Without Borders' 2020 World Press Freedom Index.

Source: Arab news

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1753071/media>

Femicide crisis worsens, authorities Punish women human rights defenders



The Turkish authorities continue to crack down on women's rights defenders in the country, as the prosecutions and arrests of female lawyers defending the rights of the women killed by men due to domestic violence after refusing to continue the marriage or requesting separation continue.

At least 43 women were murdered in Turkey by men between last October and early November, according to Stop Femicide, the largest feminist non-governmental organization that advocates women's rights in the country.

The well-known activist, Malak Onder, told Al-Arabiya, "Women struggle in Turkey to demand their rights, and every day there are women who go to police stations and courts to seek protection, but the laws are not implemented as it should be."

"Women are killed, not commit suicide as the Turkish authorities claim. We also deal with suspicious cases. For example, 152 women lost their lives in mysterious circumstances during 2020. A total of 269 women have been killed since the beginning of this year, and the perpetrators are allowed to repeat their crimes, as a result of not being held accountable and punished," she added.

On Thursday, the 19th of November, Turkish security forces arrested 17 members of the Bar Association in the Kurdish-majority city of Diyarbakir, in the southeast of the country, among whom several female lawyers defending women's rights and demanding equality with men.

It is important to note that Turkey signed the "Istanbul Treaty" in 2011 and entered into force in August 2014. This international treaty obliges Turkey to create legal mechanisms to combat gender-based violence and discrimination

The "Istanbul Treaty", from which Turkey intends to withdraw, is an international agreement that Ankara agreed to discuss with the European Council for Human Rights in 2011 and then entered into force in August 2014. The treaty aims to create legal mechanisms to combat gender-based violence and discrimination. However, reflecting on Turkey's recent incidents, it can be stated that Turkey fails these international obligations.

Source: Egypt today

Turkey: Femicide crisis worsens, authorities punish women human rights defenders - EgyptToday

Trials in Turkey

Police officers on trial for the murder of a lawyer



On Wednesday, the 21st of October, three police officers went on trial for the murder of a prominent lawyer and human rights defender nearly five years ago.

Lawyer Tahir Elci was shot and killed while making a press statement on the destruction of a historic mosque in the Sur district of Diyarbakir province. The officers are charged with "causing death by foreseeable negligence," which resulted in Elci's death on the 28th of November, 2015. The officers face possible prison sentences of two to six years in prison.

The police officers attended the proceedings through video and were not in detention.

At the time, Sur and other areas in the southeast had seen intense clashes between Turkish security forces and members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and round-the-clock curfews. Two PKK militants shot and killed two police officers in a nearby street and ran toward the streets where the news conference was held, exchanging gunfire with other police officers. Turkish officials previously said Elci got caught in the crossfire.

A fourth suspect on trial, an alleged member of the PKK who is not in custody, is accused of the intentional killing of the two police officers, the foreseeable intentional killing of Elci, and "disrupting the unity and territorial integrity of the state."

The 40-page indictment said the bullet that killed Elci was never found, and therefore the gun could not be identified. It said the three police officers as well as two militants, had fired their guns.

Elci, 49, was the head of the Diyarbakir bar association. An ethnic Kurd, he received death threats. He was to go on trial for "terror propaganda" after calling the PKK an armed political movement rather than a terrorist organization during a television program.

Elci worked as a human rights lawyer in southeastern Turkey, handling cases involving enforced disappearances and killings by security forces during the 1990s when the conflict between Turkey and the PKK was at its bloodiest.

Research group Forensic Architecture, which published a detailed analysis of Elci's killing, said the 2015 slayings of the police officers and Elci should be considered separate incidents.

The research group, based at the University of London, said its investigation revealed that the shot that killed Elci could have only come from one of the police officers.

Human Rights Watch said there were "huge obstacles" to an effective investigation, including the alleged failure by investigators to collect evidence at the crime scene or to inspect the officers' firearms.

"For five years, the family and friends of Tahir Elci have pushed for an effective investigation of his killing and for his killers to be brought to justice," Human Rights Watch deputy program director Tom Porteous said. "Many in the human rights movement in Turkey and internationally will be focused on whether the conduct of the trial is designed to reveal the full circumstances of Elci's killing or instead to try to exonerate the police at all cost."

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Source: The English Alaraby

<https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/10/21/turkey-police-officers-on-trial-for-killing-of-lawyer>

Trial on young woman's violent murder



On the 9th of November, Mr. C Avcı and his brother went on trial for the murder of Pınar Gültekin, a 27-year-old woman who was found dead last July in the province. The murder had stirred up public outrage in the country over the deaths of women at the hands of their spouses. Gültekin had disappeared after leaving her home in Muğla on the 16th of July. With mounting evidence against him, her former boyfriend Cemal Metin Avcı confessed that he had strangled her to death before burning her body and dumping it in a forest. The murder suspect faces aggravated life imprisonment while prosecutors are asking for up to five years in prison for the brother. Protests have erupted all over Turkey against the women's murders after Gültekin's body was discovered. The violence is a thorny issue for Turkey where lenient sentences for such crimes anger the public. The perpetrators often blame victims for "staining their honor" by cheating or filing for divorce, something stemming from a warped patriarchal mindset that still prevails in some parts of society. Lenient interpretation of laws by courts and a controversial legal option of "unfair incitement" added to verdicts help some perpetrators to get away with prison terms less than life imprisonment, to the chagrin of rights activists.

Source: Daily Sabah

<https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/investigations/trial-begins-on-young-womans-violent-murder-that-shook-turkey>



Turkey Report

October 2020

Referential

This report aims to highlight the various human rights violations in Turkey during October (2020). In compiling this report, GHRD used information from various sources that covered these grave inhuman violations.

Therefore GHRD wants to pay their gratitude to the following sources:

The Conversation

It is a network of not-for-profit media outlets that publish copyright-free news stories on the internet that are written by academics and researchers.

Arab News

An English daily newspaper published in Saudi Arabia. It is published in Riyadh. Arab news offers a variety of news ranging from politics and finance to sports and social events.

Economist

An international weekly newspaper printed in magazine format and published digitally focuses on current affairs, international businesses, politics, and technology.

Egypt today

News platform focused on local news, politics, business, economy, and culture.