

**4th UN Forum on Minority Issues
29-30th November, 2011, Geneva
Statement by Ela Esra Gunad
The Association for Social Change, Turkey**

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
And civil society representatives;

The Forum on Minority Issues offers an essential opportunity to address the challenges and problems for minorities. I am Ela Esra Gunad, speaking on behalf of The Association for Social Change, Turkey, an NGO working to ensure the coexistence of different identities, and eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination. I want to draw attention to continued violations of economic, social and cultural rights of the Kurds in Turkey and in particular the impact on Kurdish women.

The Kurds are an ethnic minority group, of approximately 14 million people, yet despite their size, Kurds are not officially recognized as a minority group in Turkey and the existence of the language and culture continues to be denied. As a result of tensions between the Turkish government and PKK, between 1-3 million Kurds have been displaced from their villages, over the last 20 years, as part of the government's strategy on combating terrorism in the East and South East Anatolian parts of Turkey. The majority of Kurds lived in these two regions. Their income and lifestyle was connected directly to the regions, mainly through agriculture and livestock. This displacement has been well documented in several international reports.

After their forced displacement, many Kurdish people moved to cities, where they face harsh poverty and high levels of unemployment. 60% of the population in mainly Kurdish areas, are existing below the poverty line. Meanwhile, specifically Village Guards –pro-government group- have benefited from the displaced people's lands. The strategy has resulted with violation of right to use their property and lands.

Accounts of discrimination against Kurds because of their birth place, appearance or accent is common in everyday life. This, in conjunction with poverty and other factors, including discriminative customs against girls and women, sexual violence, discrimination in employment, restriction on the use of mother tongue in daily life, limited educational services in Kurdish region and a lack of livelihood programs for, in particular, for displaced peoples, creates an environment, in which Kurdish women in particular face multiple and interlinking forms of discrimination.

Referring to Draft Recommendation Article 77, I want to stress that displacement and lack of access to the use of a land, has resulted in an inadequate standard of living, with multiple effects for Kurdish women's economic independence, social status and political influence. Therefore, I would like to welcome Turkish government to develop educational and employment programs for displaced Kurdish women in economic life at national and local level. I would also like to acknowledge positive measures on affirmative action, established by the government in 2009, aimed at addressing the Kurdish issue. However, these are not being followed through.

The Association for Social Change calls upon the Turkish state:

- To enact the Law on Combating Discrimination, and eliminate all forms of discrimination under the rule of law, with a further consideration of awareness-raising in all public departments regarding the prohibition of discrimination.
- To fulfil Draft Recommendation Article 83, which urges the government to develop sustainable plans to implement policies and programmes in regions where the Kurds predominantly live and ensure minority inclusion in gender budgets and programmes for women's economic empowerment.
- To sign Optional Protocol of ESCR and guaranteeing the rights of minority women unprepare supportive programmes to ensure these rights for minority girls and women.

Thank you.