

United Nations Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review, 8th Session
Christian Solidarity Worldwide – Stakeholder Submission
TURKEY

INTRODUCTION

1. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is a human rights organisation specialising in freedom of religion and belief. CSW monitors the human rights situation in Turkey and undertakes fact finding visits to the country as well as raising awareness of human rights concerns and advocating for particular cases of discrimination and persecution on the basis of religious affiliation.
2. This submission seeks to highlight CSW's current concerns over the treatment of religious minorities in Turkey. Today, 99 per cent of Turkish society is considered to be Muslim, of which 80 per cent are Sunni and 20 per cent Alevi and other Shi'ite. The Alevi are the largest group of Muslim minorities; Christians comprise the significant majority of non-Muslim minorities.

STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS

3. Freedom of religion and belief, including the freedom to manifest and to proselytise a religion or belief, are protected in Turkey by the Turkish Constitution and Turkish Criminal Law. These freedoms are further protected by binding international human rights treaties to which Turkey is a party. These treaties include the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). However, these positive provisions are hindered by two key structural problems;

1. Official interpretation of Secularism

4. The founding fathers of the Turkish Republic, led by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, adopted a secular vision for a modernised country and implemented radical changes such as the end of the caliphate system, the separation of religion and the state, and the banning of religious schools, sects and dress codes. From the outset, the Turkish version of secularism has not been so much about a strict division of religion and state, as about state control of the official form of Islam.
5. The Directorate for Religious Affairs (Diyanet Isleri Mudurlugu) regulates mosques, employs imams (Islamic clergy), writes sermons to be preached at the mosques and produces educational material under the direct authority of the Prime Ministry. The General Directorate for Foundations (Vakiflar Genel Mudurlugu) regulates the activities and properties of non-Muslim religious groups, as well as Muslim charitable foundations. The Turkish Armed Forces serve as a safety net for the implementation of Kemalist principles and discharge officers known to have ties with, or sympathy towards, Islamist groups.

6. The State, via the Directorate for Religious Affairs, promotes a single interpretation of Islam, called Hanafi. This poses a particular problem for the Alevi. Alevi religious centres, *Cemevi*, are not accepted as places of worship and Alevi tradition is not taught in compulsory religious education textbooks.
7. The Turkish state's official enforcement of a single creed and unique perception of secularism results in deeper problems for non-Muslim minorities in the country, ranging from having no legal basis for their religious worship centres to not being allowed to provide theological education to train new clergy members. In 1971, Turkey prohibited schools from teaching Orthodox theology and closed the only training facility for Orthodox clergy, the Halki Theological Seminary. Limitations on theological education and visas for foreign clergymen to work in the country not only hinder the flourishing of non-Muslim communities but also effectively lead to their demise.

2. Official interpretation of Citizenship

8. The marginalisation of non-Muslims in Turkey is the result of an official, state doctrine which seeks to create a homogenised Turkey comprised of one language, one race and one religion. This policy has remained unchallenged until very recently, sanctioning a host of human rights violations. The state's position enables the non-implementation of provisions of international human rights law, despite being adopted by national legislation. Non-Muslim citizens of Turkey are not seen as Turks, even though they might be ethnically Turkish and have converted from Islam to another religion.
9. Practically, this means that non-Muslims are not employed within the civil and diplomatic service and security or armed forces, even though they are conscripted for compulsory military service like every other Turkish citizen. They are regularly marginalised and freely targeted by nationalist and Islamist media and groups, and their activities and presence is often seen as a threat to social harmony. This limits the socio-economic involvement of religious minorities in day-to-day life and results in their isolation within their own communities. Various population movements between Turkey and Greece, the Armenian genocide of 1915 and subsequent social pressures towards non-Muslims have resulted in mass emigration of minorities.
10. **Recommendation: the Turkish state must seek to fulfil its obligations under the ICCPR, particularly Article 18, not only in national legislation, but also in policy and practice. The state must proactively accommodate non-Muslim minorities in mainstream society and address their socio-economic concerns.**

STATE-FUELLED PROPAGANDA

11. Reports issued since 2005 by security and intelligence forces on foreign missionary activities, and the alarm of nationalist and Islamist civil society groups over perceived agendas of non-Muslims, has placed religious conversion and proselytism firmly on the state's agenda. Subsequently, the umbrella term 'missionary activities' has been officially classified as a national threat, resulting in the close monitoring of non-Muslim activities by security and military forces, the inclusion of missionary

activities in national intelligence briefings and sermons on the subject being prepared by the Directorate of Religious Affairs for mosques.

12. In addition to information disseminated by the Turkish state against missionary activity, the media has reported widely on missionaries, accusing them of bribing vulnerable Turkish youths with sex with under-age girls, visas for the US and Europe, employment, money and alcohol if they convert to the Christian faith. The missionaries' alleged great aim is to turn Turkish youths against their "mother nation". Even though the state runs an effective media watchdog, the Supreme Board of Radio and Television (RTUK), to monitor and control the media, these slanderous accusations are never challenged, criticised or punished, despite the RTUK's mandate including intervention for stopping racist and provocative reporting.
13. The same official attitudes continue to show themselves in school textbooks. In the current Ministry of Education's compulsory textbook for 8th grade students in primary education, entitled "Primary Education, History of Republic Reforms and Atatürkism", it states:
14. *Missionary activity is not ordinary propagation of religion. It cannot be considered under freedom of thought and freedom to express opinion. It is a systematic and organized movement that forces people to change their religion. Missionaries have political, cultural and economic aims in addition to religious aims. They try to fulfill their goals with significant material support from foreign forces, non-governmental organizations and from their own supporters. Missionaries abuse financial difficulties that people experience. They translate texts related to their religion into various languages and distribute them for free and use written and visual media for their propaganda. They constitute a threat to our nation's national unity and wholeness.*
15. This dangerous propaganda by the Turkish state has only served to cement deep-seated suspicions towards non-Muslims, and bolster widespread beliefs in conspiracy theories. The State's misinformation has moulded a virtually unanimous social attitude toward missionaries, and resulted in normative classification of missionary activity as a 'crime' and a serious 'national threat', rather than a valid part of freedom of religion and belief as protected by international human rights law.
16. On 11 October 2006, Gendarmerie officials stormed the residence of two Muslim-background Turkish Christians, Hakan Tastan (37) and Turan Topal (46), with a search warrant, before confiscating computers and documents from Mr Tastan and Mr Topal's office in Istanbul. The two men were taken to Silivri where they were subjected to interrogation by military officials and then taken to the prosecutor.
17. Mr Tastan and Mr Topal, who were both working for a local Christian ministry, were accused of "insulting Turkishness", inciting hatred against Islam, disrespecting the Turkish Army, promoting sexual promiscuity, promising money to convert Muslims to Christianity, and gathering personal information about people with whom they were in contact. During their first court hearing on 23 November 2008, an ultranationalist group held an impromptu press conference and protest, asking the court to find them guilty on these charges. The court is yet to give an official verdict.

The previous prosecutor handling the case stated officially that the men had committed no crimes and that there was no hard evidence with which to accuse them. In addition, several witnesses have changed their testimonies and denied their initial allegations, further calling into question the legitimacy of the men's arrest.

- 18. Recommendation: the Turkish state must end its official classification of 'missionary activities' as a national threat, uphold its freedom of religion and belief obligations under international human rights law, stop state propaganda and remove all mention of non-Muslim activities as a national threat from school textbooks, military and police national security briefings and proactively promote a culture of tolerance and respect to other religious creeds.**

INCREASING ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANS

19. The actions of the Turkish state and its silent approval of discriminatory media reporting and like-minded action of civil society organisations have unquestionably put its non-Muslim citizens in a vulnerable situation and have also fostered a dangerous public opinion towards apostates. According to the 2008 report of Pew Global Attitudes Project, 74 per cent of Turks hold unfavourable views towards Christians, which is the highest percentage in the survey and 76 per cent hold negative views of Jews.
20. The direct outcome of the increasing negative attitudes towards Christians has been a worrying trend of attacks on individuals, churches and ministries. The latest example of this took place on 3 August 2009. A young, Turkish Christian, Ismail Aydin, was taken hostage in broad daylight in one of the busiest areas of Istanbul. The attacker held Mr Aydin at knife point, wrapping a Turkish flag over his head, shouting: 'Godless people, they are doing missionary work.' The self-declared motivation of the attacker, against Mr. Aydin's supposed involvement in 'missionary work', signals the direct outcome of state-fuelled propaganda.
21. Between January 2006 and November 2009, there have been numerous Molotov cocktail attacks on churches. These have led to material damage of Christian property, death threats, minor assaults, attempted kidnappings, and the murders of two Turkish Christians, one German missionary, one Roman Catholic priest and an Armenian Orthodox journalist.
22. CSW and domestic NGOs are worried that the instigators of these attacks, those who rally mobs of young boys to carry them out, are almost never brought to justice, and have been known to hold official positions in society. Such impunity fosters injustice and raises significant concerns over direct involvement of military, security and intelligence officers in the attacks. The Turkish state is responsible for propagating discriminatory and dangerous attitudes towards non-Muslims, failing to bring to justice those responsible for the attacks and failing to adequately address the underlying issues.
23. CSW is particularly concerned with the handling of the cases of Aydin-Yukse-Geske by the Turkish courts. On 18 April 2007, two Turkish men, Necati Aydin and Ugur Yuksel, and one German national, Tillman Geske, were brutally murdered by a group

of young men in the office of the Christian publication company, Zirve Publications, in Malatya, Eastern Turkey. CSW has been closely monitoring the ongoing court hearings of the accused murderers. We have repeatedly expressed concerns over the prosecutors' reluctance to pursue the connections of the accused murderers with official intelligence officers and nationalist party members. Similarly, the lawyers representing the families of the murdered men have regularly drawn attention to the fact that the prosecutor's case file focuses more on the activities of the murdered Christian men and the Christian publication company they work for, than on the accused murderers. There has been serious mishandling of crucial evidence: a series of video tapes recorded during the questioning of one of the accused men during his hospital treatment, which allegedly included a full confession of the crime and planners behind the attack, has been lost. CSW continues to monitor the court's handling of the case, and to document how such malpractice could contribute to a culture of impunity that could lead to further attacks.

- 24. Recommendation: Turkey must address increasing violence against Christians, bringing the perpetrators to justice.**