

Turkey: Genocide Emergency
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The Republic of Turkey was established in 1923, with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as its first president. Turkey is 99.98 percent Sunni Muslim. It is ethnically 80 percent Turkish, and 18 percent Kurdish. Until recently, the Turkish government denied that the Kurds are a minority group, calling them “mountain Turks.” The country’s transition to multiparty democracy was interrupted by military coups in 1960, 1971, and 1980, as well as in the military ouster of an Islamist government in 1997.

In 1984, the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), a Kurdish separatist group, began an insurgency campaign against the Turkish government. The Kurdish -Turkish conflict has claimed over 40,000 lives. Turkish security forces burned over 3,000 Kurdish villages. Kurdish schools and political parties were banned. Peace talks began in 2012, but hostilities restarted in 2015 following the Suruc bombing by a violent wing of the PKK.

According to the International Crisis Group, between 2015 and 2016, Turkish forces killed over 1,000 Kurds, and over 350,000 Kurds were forcibly displaced. Houses, schools, and official buildings have been heavily damaged by artillery and gunfire. The Turkish Human Rights Foundation accuses the Turkish Armed Forces and Gendarmerie of targeting civilians under the pretext of fighting terrorism. Many residents in Kurdish cities have been trapped without food or electricity as clashes between Kurdish militants and Turkish security forces have intensified.

In December 2015, the Kurdish city of Cizre was under curfew for more than two weeks, with mounting civilian casualties. The town had limited access to water and food and the injured could not receive medical treatment. When the Turkish army entered Cizre, it leveled entire neighborhoods with tanks and bulldozers, burying alive many people who had fled to basements for safety. The Council of Europe expressed concern over the attacks on civilians and the blockade of Cizre, citing it as disproportionate use of force against civilians, which is a war crime.

The European Union has been highly critical of Turkish human rights abuses of the Kurdish population under the cloak of its fight against terrorism. In May 2016, the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, raised concern over the Turkish government’s refusal to allow a UN team to conduct research in the Kurdish areas of Turkey. There has been a total lack of action by NATO governments and international organizations regarding the abuses suffered by the Kurdish population.

The Turkish Air Force has even bombed Kurdish villages in northern Iraq. Turkey has focused more on fighting Kurds than on combating ISIS.

Since the failed military coup against President Erdogan of summer 2016, his loyalists have arrested over 50,000 people, including many journalists and opposition leaders, who remain in prison. Torture is routine in Turkish prisons.

Genocide Watch considers the situation in Turkey to be at stage 9 of the Genocide process, **Extermination**, with pro-Erdogan forces in the Turkish army and police as the perpetrators and opposition leaders and Kurdish civilians as the victims. Turkey is also at **stage 10, Denial**, because of the Turkish government’s hundred-year refusal to recognize the Armenian, Assyrian, and Pontic Greek genocide that occurred under the Ottoman Empire from 1915 - 1922.

Genocide Watch recommends:

- The EU should make it a condition for Turkey to enter the EU that it grant self-rule to its Kurds.
- The UN, US, and EU should work with Turkish authorities to allow the return of the Kurds who have been forcibly displaced from their towns and villages.
- The Turkish government should allow UN human rights staff and other impartial observers, including civil society organizations and journalists, to investigate the events in Cizre.
- International organizations should recognize the human rights abuses suffered by the Kurdish population as genocide.