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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Sustainable development and discrimination against Minorities in Turkey

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. These 17 Goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, while including new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among other priorities. The SDGs work in the spirit of partnership and pragmatism to make the right choices now to improve life, in a sustainable way, for future generations. They provide clear guidelines and targets for all countries to adopt in accordance with their own priorities and the environmental challenges of the world at large. The SDGs are an inclusive agenda. They tackle the root causes of poverty and unite us together to make a positive change for both people and planet.¹

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development strives to leave no-one behind, envisaging a world of universal respect for equality and non-discrimination between and within countries, including gender equality, by reaffirming the responsibilities of all States to respect, protect and promote human rights, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national and social origin, property, birth, disability or other status. Alongside a wide range of social, economic and environmental objectives, the 2030 Agenda promises “more peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence” with attention to democratic governance, rule of law, access to justice and personal security. It therefore covers issues related to all human rights, including economic, civil, cultural, political, social rights and the right to development.²

Persistent discrimination against Minorities in Turkey

Turkey consists of a mixed population of ethnic and religious minorities, where Kurds, Roma (Gypsies), Alawis and Yazidis live with Turks, who represent the largest proportion of the population. The Treaty of Lausanne, which is the base of the foundation of the Turkish Republic, has defined minorities in Turkey as non-Muslims groups, which are Christian and Jewish groups or any other group that are not of the Islamic religion. Thus, the treaty has included Romania and Greece residing in Turkey as Christians, and the Turkish Constitution has not addressed the issue of ethnic minorities as every citizen in Turkey is a Turkish citizen not in terms of race but in terms of national identity.

Article 10 of the Turkish Constitution of 1982 states that all citizens are equal before the law, without distinction as to language, race, color, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion or sect.³ However, since the Treaty of Lausanne, Armenians, Roma and Jews have been legally recognized as minorities, therefore they do not form part of the State of Turkey even if they enjoy equal civil rights. Ankara has undertaken to protect these minorities under a number of provisions of the Treaty, however, it has not complied with its commitments. The official attitude of the state and a large section of the political class and the media professionals towards these minorities, who are considered an internal enemy, is hostile. Jewish and Christian minorities are considered as second-class citizens, they are victims of a lot of discrimination, violence and ridicule of media. Roma are discriminated against, also Alewis suffer from discrimination and humiliation. There are also relatively

¹ The Sustainable Development Goals, UNPD, link, <http://www.tr.undp.org/content/turkey/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

² Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, OHCHR, link, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/SDGS/pages/the2030agenda.aspx>

³ - بكر البدور، الخصائص الاثنية للمجتمع التركي، موقع البوصلة، 14 يناير 2018، الرابط، <https://bit.ly/2IVfG5V>

silent and integrated communities, such as Armenian-speaking Muslims known as the Hameshins, who live in total isolation in the Artvin Province and numbering 40,000.⁴

Racial discrimination against the Roma

Despite the improvement in some aspects of the life of the Turkish Roma in the last decade at the official level, this minority still suffers from many problems in Turkey, from government racial discrimination against them to poverty and poor education.

As other ethnic minorities, there are no official statistics and estimates vary from about half a million Roma. Some statistics confirm that the Roma and Roma-style communities range from two million to five million. The Roma, like other minorities in Turkey, suffer from the central national policies of the state adopted since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, which sought to integrate all ethnic minorities and nationalities from the Ottoman Empire into one Turkish identity, leading to the exclusion and marginalization of all members of minorities who were unable to be integrated into this identity. However, the Roma have a language of their own, but only a minority of them speak the language, while the majority speak Turkish mixed with some of the Roma words. The Roma in Turkey, as in all the countries where they live, suffer from extreme poverty and high crime. The Roma in Turkey, do not have equal rights with Turks to education and housing.⁵

With respect to education, only very few of them enroll in primary education, which makes their access to work is often impossible and leads to a lack of healthcare for workers. The unemployment rate among the Roma is 85%, the largest proportion compared with any other group. The illiteracy rate among Roma women is 80% and the marriage age for girls is between 12-18 years. The difficult social conditions of the Roma minority are due to the failure of the state to fulfill its developmental duties towards them, because of the difficulty of life in the major cities of those living in its suburbs, in addition to the distinction made by the state and its institutions between the Roma and the rest of the Turks.⁶

With regard to the right to education, the Roma face many problems and discrimination in the exercise of the right to education. Due to poverty, many of Roma children do not attend school and when they do, many drop out. There is also no clearly defined administrative legal mechanism in the law to assist them in seeking remedies, especially as there is no equality body that can assist the Roma in seeking remedies. Similarly, there is no legal aid system that can help victims of discrimination to challenge their situation.⁷

Religious education is compulsory from grade four in primary schools. Also, the emphasis remains on teaching Sunni Muslim religious practices. Non-Muslim students may apply to opt out in case that there are no alternatives.⁸ Roma and other residents of these quarters were not adequately involved in planning process of the regeneration of these areas and many of them were actually displaced without benefiting from a proper housing plan that would realistically fit their economic-social conditions and needs. Indeed, housing and urban development policies that are being developed and implemented by the state do not pay specific attention to the particular needs and situation of the Roma.⁹ The policies of urban transformation operated by the Turkish government based on the demolition of slums

⁴ <https://fanack.com/ar/turkey/population/> - السكان في تركيا، موقع فنك، 6 فبراير 2019، الرابط،

⁵ - باسم دباغ، تمييز عنصري ضد الغجر في تركيا، العربي الجديد، 3 يوليو 2018، الرابط، <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/society/تركيا-في-الغجر-ضد-عنصري-تمييز-عنصري-3/7/2018/>

⁶ - غجر تركيا.. الرافضون مع الضفادع في مستنقع العنصرية، موقع عثمانلي، 24 فبراير 2019، الرابط، <https://3thmanly.com/ar/articleالعنصرية-مستنقع-الضفادع-في-غجر-تركيا-الرافضون-مع-الضفادع-في-مستنقع-العنصرية>

⁷ Turkey: Housing and Education rights for Roma, minority rights group international, 09 Jan 2018, link, <https://minorityrights.org/programmes-evaluations/11485/>

⁸ Education system in Turkey criticised for marginalising ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, minority rights group international, press releases, 27 Oct, 2015, link, <https://minorityrights.org/2015/10/27/education-system-in-turkey-criticised-for-marginalising-ethnic-religious-and-linguistic-minorities/>

⁹ Turkey: Housing and Education rights for Roma, minority rights group international, 09 Jan 2018, link, <https://minorityrights.org/programmes-evaluations/11485/>

and the reconstruction of another houses in their place, through the confiscation the Roma's houses and the construction of luxury housing, re-housing the Roma in other areas outside the city, as happened in the neighborhood **Solukule** in Fatih, Istanbul, where the Roma were housed 40 mile from their old neighborhood.¹⁰

Therefore, Ankara arguably refuses to recognize any minority that was not provided for in the Lausanne Convention and therefore refuses to grant the rights of the Roma minority. Successive governments have exercised all forms of discrimination, racism, neglect and injustice against minorities. Turkey's attitude towards the Roma minority is governed by its desire to remove them from economic, political and cultural life, on the one hand, and to highlight a picture of them that is commensurate with its desire to gain respectable status on the international scene.

Recommendations

The Government of Turkey should adhere to the objective of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ensuring that no one is marginalized, by the recognition of the rights of ethnic minorities.

The Government of Turkey should give priority to the development of an approach that ensures equality among all groups of society and respond to the demands of rights on the basis of this approach of equality.

The best interests of the child and the right to education should be protected in accordance with international standards.

To cease the discrimination exercised by the Turkish authorities against the minorities, especially the Roma people, and to grant them all rights.

¹⁰ - باسم دباغ، تمييز عنصري ضد الغجر في تركيا، العربي الجديد، 3 يوليو 2018، الرابط، <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/society/تركيا-في-الغجر-في-تركيا-عنصري-ضد-الغجر-في-تركيا> 3/7/2018/