



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/44/330
19 June 1989

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Forty-fourth session
Items 101 and 107 of the preliminary list*

ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

Letter dated 19 June 1989 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey
to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to submit herewith the text of a letter dated 16 June 1989 from H.E. A. Mesut Yilmaz, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, addressed to you, on the plight of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria and the recent massive expulsion of many thousands of these people to Turkey (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would kindly have this letter and the enclosed letter from the Foreign Minister and its appendices circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda items 101 and 107 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Mustafa AKSIN
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/44/50/Rev.1.

ANNEX

Letter dated 16 June 1989 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey on the plight of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria and the recent massive expulsion of many thousands of them to Turkey

The sudden arrival in Turkey of many thousands of destitute people of Turkish origin who have been forcefully expelled from Bulgaria has focused world public opinion, once again, on the plight of the Turkish minority in that country.

It will be recalled that early in 1984, the Government of Bulgaria launched a massive campaign designed to assimilate forcibly the 1.5 million - strong Turkish minority in that country. The Bulgarian Government had suddenly adopted the position that there was no Turkish minority in their country, and, to substantiate these claims, a systematic effort was made to deprive the Turkish minority of its ethnic, cultural and religious identity. To this end, all Bulgarians of Turkish origin were forced to change their names, all local publications and broadcasts in Turkish were ended, the teaching of Turkish in minority schools was stopped, even conversing in Turkish was made a punishable offense. The minority's freedom of worship was drastically curtailed, travel to and from Turkey was prevented and telephone and postal links with Turkey were cut. These measures were taken in violation of Bulgaria's contractual obligations under bilateral and multilateral treaties. Those protesting these measures were sent to concentration camps and many were forced into internal exile. The number of people killed during this period is not known exactly, but several human rights organizations have documented the atrocities committed at that time.

The tragedy of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria was also acknowledged and listed in detail in the report submitted by Special Rapporteur Dr. Angelo Vidal d'Almeida Ribeiro to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in February 1988 in connection with the implementation of the U.N. declaration on the elimination of religious intolerance and discrimination.

The report of the Contact Group of the Organization of the Islamic Conference also provides graphic evidence of the repression of the Muslims of Bulgaria who are predominantly of Turkish stock. This latest report, submitted to the eighteenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers along with the resolution adopted at that meeting and the paragraph dealing with the subject in the final communique have been circulated as a document of the General Assembly (A/44/190) on 9 March 1989.

The Government of Turkey has repeatedly stated, since the beginning of the repression that it was prepared to discuss the situation of the Turkish minority with the Bulgarian Government so as to ensure the restoration of and respect for the human and minority rights of these loyal Bulgarian citizens. The Government of Turkey also stated that it was prepared to discuss the emigration to Turkey of those members of the Turkish minority who might wish to do so. These Turkish requests for opening a dialogue were repeatedly rejected by Bulgaria. However, Turkey persisted in its demand for talks. Eventually, these efforts succeeded, and in February 1988 Turkey and Bulgaria signed the Belgrade Protocol which, inter alia, provided for the discussion of humanitarian issues between the two countries.

Unfortunately, several meetings were held within the framework of the Belgrade Protocol without bringing any relief to the suffering of the Turkish Minority, owing to the obstructionist attitude of the Bulgarian side.

On the contrary, the repression has continued unabated until finally, many members of the Turkish minority were forced recently to demonstrate peacefully and undertake hunger strikes to protest the violation of their most basic human rights. These peaceful protests were brutally suppressed by the Bulgarian authorities with tragic loss of life.

These events took place on the eve of the Human Dimension Meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which opened in Paris on 30 May 1989, and I had the occasion to express my Government's views on this massive violation of human rights and dignity in my statement at the conference. The text of my statement was also circulated as a document of the General Assembly (A/44/30) on 9 June 1989.

In the period that has elapsed since then, a new and very grave development has taken place. Within a period of a few weeks more than 30,000 ethnic Turks have been forcibly and cruelly expelled from their country by the Bulgarian Government. The Government of Turkey is taking the necessary steps to cope with this massive influx of uprooted people and we are appreciative of the assistance provided by the UNHCR in this context. The number of deportees is increasing daily. They are arriving with a few personal possessions, having been forced to abandon practically all of their worldly belongings. There is every indication that this policy of deportation will continue.

President Kenan Evren made a statement on this subject on 14 June 1989, and Prime Minister Ozal on 15 June 1989. The texts of these statements are enclosed herewith.

The Council of Europe has reacted vigorously against this forced exodus of human beings whose only crime is to demand respect for their human rights. On 15 June 1989, the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Secretary-General of the Council issued a joint statement expressing their grave concern in the following way:

"News of the increasing harshness of the pressure exerted on the Turkish minority in Bulgaria and the deportation of thousands of people belonging to that minority give cause for grave concern in the Council of Europe. The Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, Mr. Thorvald Stoltenberg, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, The President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. Anders Bjerck, and the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, Mrs. Catherine Lalumiere, drew attention to the obligations arising from the international treaties in force and the undertaking entered into by all the states participating in the CSCE process with regard to the protection of human rights and the treatment of minorities. They appeal to the authorities in Bulgaria to put a stop to the repression and violations of human dignity and seek urgent and satisfactory solution to the problem of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria through openness and constructive dialogue."

I shall be grateful if you would kindly give this serious problem your most careful consideration, and seek all the necessary means to alleviate the plight of the unfortunate victims of these hideous acts through the assistance of the United Nations and its agencies in accordance with relevant General Assembly resolutions.

Furthermore, I shall appreciate it if you would kindly bring this letter and its enclosures to the attention of the President and members of the Security Council so that they may be apprised of this colossal human tragedy which is also marring normal relations between Turkey and Bulgaria and carrying the potential for adversely affecting peace and stability in the region.

APPENDIX I

Statement dated 14 June 1989 by the President of Turkey

The latest developments in Bulgaria have brought the tragedy of the Turkish minority and the inhuman oppression this minority is going through to the attention of world public opinion.

Since 1984, Bulgaria has denied the existence of the 1.5 million - strong Turkish minority. In violation of all the international treaties to which it is a party and ignoring all basic humanitarian norms, Bulgaria has conducted a ruthless campaign of assimilation.

The existence of the Muslim Turkish minority in Bulgaria is a fact that derives not only from the texts of international agreements but also from many statements made by the Bulgarian leaders prior to 1984. The Bulgarian Head of State has on numerous occasions made reference to "Turkish minority", "Turkish people" or "Bulgarian Turks" before 1984. He has used these terms in his conversations with me. In fact, there is a Turkish minority in Bulgaria. It is for this reason that the two countries have entered into agreements regarding the status and rights of this minority and providing for migration to Turkey and also for the reunification of families. Against this background, Bulgaria's claims to the effect that there is no Turkish minority do not have any credibility. Bulgaria has been an independent state for a period of over 80 years. For the last 5 years it has been trying to deny a fact that it has acknowledged for 75 years. Nevertheless, the people who are being denied their ethnic identity insist on being Turkish. After claiming that there are no people of Turkish stock in Bulgaria, Bulgaria must now explain this. Who are the thousands of people who are now being expelled and why are they being deported to Turkey and not to another Muslim country? The only crime of these people is to be Turkish and to be living in Bulgaria. In this last quarter of the twentieth century, when respect for human rights in Europe and throughout the world is at its peak, these people are being deprived of all of their rights, subjected to ill treatment and forcibly expelled from the country of which they are citizens. Some of them have even been killed. All civilized countries have a duty to oppose these inhuman practices.

As President of Turkey I am appealing to the world. A tragedy of enormous dimensions, a great human drama is unfolding in Bulgaria. This is not just a question affecting Turkey. It affects all of mankind. I am inviting all states and organizations, and the mass media to strive to bring to an early end this tragedy.

Bulgaria is forcefully sending its citizens that it claims are not of Turkish origin to Turkey. Thus, Bulgaria is admitting that it cannot, single handedly solve a problem of its own making. Turkey is maintaining its border open to alleviate the suffering of its kinsmen. But Bulgaria must urgently come to the negotiating table to settle this problem it has with Turkey and to make arrangements for migration.

This question cannot be settled merely through voluntary or enforced migration. It is essential that those of the Turkish minority remaining in Bulgaria have their rights fully respected. It should be remembered that history has demonstrated repeatedly that those regimes that base their policies on contradictions, rancor and hate inevitably end up by paying for their actions.

The difficulties of our kinsmen living in Bulgaria have transformed this matter into a national question. To overcome this national question we require full national solidarity free of all partisan considerations. I am glad to note that all of our political parties are acting with the same high degree of sensitivity on this important question.

I am deeply convinced that the Turkish Nation will acquit itself successfully in this important test.

APPENDIX II

Statement dated 15 June 1989 by the Prime Minister of Turkey

As you know, I had already announced on 30 May 1989, in response to Mr. Zhivkov, that we were ready, inter alia, to start negotiating with Bulgaria in order to conclude a comprehensive agreement on emigration.

It is unfortunate that we have yet to receive a positive response to our call which was constructive and made in good faith.

In stark contrast, the answer of the Bulgarian authorities was to subject this beleaguered people to deportation, sending thousands of them daily to Turkey with a few personal belongings while holding in ransom any valuables they had acquired through their labour and any property they had inherited from their forefathers.

In brief, the Bulgarian authorities are extracting a heavy price from those who are fleeing to liberty and who have asked for nothing more than the right to live as human beings, by adding to their untold sufferings of recent years.

Their intention is to force our kinsmen to make hard choices while trying to embarrass Turkey which has always expressed its policy on this matter by declaring that it is ready, if necessary, to receive all its kinsmen in Bulgaria. They are deluding themselves and miscalculating badly.

I repeat here and now: the dimensions of this matter transcend the confines of the short-sighted tactical manoeuvres of the Bulgarian authorities. This is a humanitarian question in its nature. World public opinion understands this very well and the momentum of its reaction is building up with each passing day. As a matter of fact, the whole world is going through a test of civilization, the results of which will be judged by the stance countries are taking now and will adopt in the future in the face of this human tragedy. As we have always held, this matter is beyond being an issue between Turkey and Bulgaria, but rather one which concerns the whole community of nations. As such, it calls for having recourse to all existing mechanisms and the display of realism, common sense and compassion to achieve a solution.

As we have always maintained, we never had the idea of doing anything to the detriment of our neighbour Bulgaria. Today, this remains unchanged. The issue at hand is to preserve and to restore the rights and the dignity of one and a half million innocent people. I now appeal, once again, to Bulgaria to negotiate with us a comprehensive agreement on emigration.

For this purpose I propose and express our readiness to meet at the earliest at a location suitable for both sides, with a view to starting and concluding negotiations in a manner compatible with the nature of the issue at hand and with the presence of the High Commissioner for Refugees so that we may benefit from the experience and services of U.N. agencies.

Undoubtedly, Bulgaria's responsibility as regards the restoration of the rights of our kinsmen who may remain in that country for whatever reason, and respecting these rights in compliance with contemporary norms and values will still be there. It goes without saying that Turkey as well as the international community, will follow closely this aspect of the issue as well.
