



UPOTUDAK
THE GENERAL SITUATION
IN TURKISH PRISONS

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It is clear that the conflict between imperialist poles brings more poverty to all oppressed sections of society, especially the working class. The internal structures of imperialist states are rapidly being redesigned within the framework of a new imperialist war of division. The atmosphere of occupation and war that has been created affects the lives of workers in many ways through reactionary laws and the deprivation of rights. The fiscal deficits resulting from increased military budgets are burdening workers with new taxes. All reactionary states are attempting to reorganize themselves in preparation for this process. With the power that comes from controlling production and capital, bourgeois states operate the mechanisms called law and justice in their own interests. Of course, in such processes, the most dynamic and "threatening" segments of society will be targeted first. This is why the working class and its organized forces, as well as nations and representatives fighting for national liberation, are being targeted on our world. The rulers' approach to this is manifested either by eliminating them or filling prisons with them. For those they do not kill, they resort to isolation and torture by applying a complete enemy law in prisons.

During the 23 years of AKP rule, the state organization, which is the instrument of power of the Turkish ruling classes, has been reshaped according to the interests of imperialism and the local comprador bourgeoisie. The "Presidential Government System" is the current form of this transformation; it is an authoritarian restructuring required by capital and imperialist centers.

With this system, all state institutions have been centralized to serve the interests of imperialist monopolies and the ruling clique, not the people. Every sphere, from the judiciary to the media, from the legislature to the security forces, has been turned into an instrument of capital's oppression.

Underlying this restructuring is a "strategy of suppressing rebellion." The organizing efforts of the people, the working class, and revolutionary forces are being dismantled; unions, democratic institutions, and social opposition are being crushed. Any segment not aligned with the ruling

bloc, even opposition within the system, is labeled "terrorist," and the space for politics is being completely narrowed.

In such a process, even the spontaneous economic and democratic demands of the working class and the laboring people have been suppressed by fascist tyranny. Strikes have been banned, demonstrations dispersed, and arrests and detentions have become routine. The Turkish state does not even comply with its own laws on paper. The immunity of members of parliament has been disregarded, and thousands of people have been imprisoned for their thoughts.

In Turkey's political history, prisons have been one of the state's tools for suppressing political opposition. Social opposition movements, particularly left-wing socialist movements, the Kurdish freedom struggle, women's and student resistance, have often been criminalized under the label of "terrorism," and thousands of people have been imprisoned for political reasons. Anti-terrorism laws enacted in recent years have almost completely restricted freedom of thought and expression. Thousands of people who shared posts on social media, participated in union actions, or engaged in journalism have been arrested on charges of "organization propaganda" or "organization membership."

The judiciary has largely lost its independence; prisons are filled with thousands of people detained for their political identity. This process symbolizes a period in which the suppression of opposition through the judiciary has become systematic.

Despite all the pressure, political prisoners in Turkey have created a strong tradition of resistance throughout history. From the hunger strikes of 1984 to the resistance in Type F prisons in the 2000s, political prisoners have continued their struggle not only with their bodies but also with their writings, practices of solidarity, and collective consciousness.

RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN TURKISH PRISONS AND PRESSURES ON POLITICAL PRISONERS

For many years, prisons in Turkey have not only been places of punishment but also served as one of the political regime's tools for suppressing opposition. Particularly in the last decade, increasing authoritarianism, the politicization of the legal system, and the

curtailment of freedom of thought have resulted in the arrest of thousands of people for political reasons. This situation has made rights violations in prisons systematic. Journalists, trade unionists, students, academics, and politicians are often sent to prison on charges of "membership in an organization" or "propaganda" simply for expressing their thoughts. In Turkey, where the judiciary has not been independent since its establishment, court proceedings have become a "political purge tool." Thus, prisons have turned into political spaces holding thousands of people from different segments of the social opposition.

Among the more than forty thousand political prisoners in Turkish prisons, there are people against whom no evidence of a crime has been found, as well as people who have been held hostage in prison despite having reports stating that over seventy percent of them are unfit to remain in prison. Attacks against local and immigrant revolutionaries are intensifying in European countries. In many countries, particularly Germany and France, new laws have been passed to attack forces that criticize and oppose the imperialist capitalist system in street protests, arresting them en masse and imprisoning them for many years.

Germany, relying on sections 129a and b of its constitution, is imposing long prison sentences on immigrant revolutionaries for fighting against fascist oppression in their own countries. Kurdish and Turkish revolutionaries, in particular, are subject to these attacks.

Political prisoners are deprived not only of their freedom but also of their basic human rights. Reports by organizations such as the Turkish Human Rights Foundation (TİHV), the Human Rights Association (İHD), and the Civil Society Association in the Penitentiary System (CİSST) show that human rights violations in prisons are widespread and structural.

The main violations of rights are as follows:

-Restriction of the right to communication and correspondence: Political prisoners' letters are confiscated, telephone calls are censored, and visitors are arbitrarily prevented from visiting.

- Isolation and segregation: Particularly in high-security F-type prisons, prisoners are subjected to long periods of solitary confinement, minimizing their social contact.

-Violation of the right to health: Prisoners with chronic illnesses are denied necessary treatment, hospital transfers are delayed or arbitrarily refused.

-Suppression of cultural and political identity: Rights such as speaking Kurdish, possessing books, or accessing politically-oriented publications are restricted, and prisoners face disciplinary penalties.

-Violence and ill-treatment in prisons: Guard violence, strip searches, arbitrary disciplinary penalties, and deportation transfers have become a policy of intimidation that goes beyond punishment in prisons.

Turkey is a signatory to international legal texts such as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, practices in prisons clearly contradict these obligations. Despite European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) rulings, arrests under the guise of freedom of expression continue, and the existence of the "political prisoner" category is denied.

RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN PRISONS AND THE SITUATION IN PRISONS

According to data from the General Directorate of Prisons and Detention Centers, as of November 1, 2024, there are a total of 406 penal institutions in Turkey, including 273 closed penal institutions, 100 independent open penal institutions, 4 children's educational institutions, 12 closed women's penal institutions, 8 open women's penal institutions, and 9 closed children's penal institutions. The total capacity of these institutions is 299,042 people. However, it should be noted that this number represents the increased capacity. Under normal conditions, these prisons should house two-thirds of the number of inmates.

Twenty-two new prisons were opened in 2022, 19 in 2023, and 12 in 2024. According to the Ministry of Justice's 2025 budget proposal, the goal for next year is to open 11 more new prisons. This shows that Turkey's current ruling ideology generally envisions a future based on imprisoning people." (IHD 2024 Prisons Report)

Prison architecture and the penal system in Turkey have been shaped in parallel with the security understanding of political powers and their approach to social opposition. The military coup of September 12, 1980, radically transformed not only the political regime but also the penal

system. The new "type" of prisons that began to be built during this period emerged as a concrete expression of the state's security paradigm.

The prison architecture developed after the coup aimed to isolate political prisoners, fragment collective life, and suppress the culture of resistance. The E, H, F, D, L, T, Y, and S type prisons built from the 1980s to the present represent different stages of this strategy.

With the September 12 coup, the large dormitory systems of the past were abandoned and E-type prisons were built. These prisons consisted of dormitories for 16–20 people and restricted the collective life of prisoners. Subsequent H-type prisons reduced this number to rooms for 4–6 people, thereby deepening physical isolation. The political meaning of this transition is clear: the elimination of solidarity and the possibility of organization arising from communal living.

In 2000, F-type prisons, the most advanced form of this process, were introduced. Consisting entirely of one- or three-person cells, these structures are the institutionalized form of the "isolation regime." F-types have paved the way for the proliferation of practices described by national and international human rights organizations as "psychological torture."

According to June 2025 data, there are a total of 416,927 "detainees" and "convicts" in Turkish prisons. "In Turkey, 420,904 prisoners are held in 402 prisons with a total capacity of 304,964. 120,013 prisoners are held in open prisons, while 300,891 are held in closed prisons. Of these prisoners, 357,646 are convicts and 63,258 are detainees. 200 are LGBTQI+, 14,276 are foreigners, and 1,453 are serving aggravated life sentences. There are 269 prisoners with disabilities in prisons: 19 with speech and language impairments, 42 with visual impairments, 28 with hearing impairments, 18 with hearing and speech impairments, and 162 with orthopedic impairments. 6,543 prisoners in prisons are over 65 years old. In 2025, the number of prisoners who can continue their education in prisons is 77,014, and there are 58,500 prisoners engaged in insured professional activities. There are 4,561 children between the ages of 12 and 18 held in prisons, 187 of whom are girls. Alongside 19,290 female prisoners, there are 434 children aged 0-3 and 388 children aged 4-6 with their mothers. (Civil Society Association in the Penitentiary System CİSST Report)

Prison capacities are known to have reached over 100,000 inmates. Turkey ranks first among Council of Europe countries in terms of the number of prisoners. According to 2022 Council of Europe prison statistics, 355 out of every 100,000 people in Turkey are in prison. This rate is 117 on average among Council of Europe countries. The overcrowding of prisons, which hold more prisoners than their capacity, has continued to increase exponentially since 2015.

Over the last 10 years, the Gezi Park and Fethullah Gülen Movement trials, the imposition of trustees on local administrations, and the investigations and subsequent arrests of politicians, journalists, and political figures have demonstrated that the fascist AKP-MHP alliance cannot tolerate any dissenting voices.

Pressure continues to be exerted on sick prisoners in jails. The number of sick prisoners identified is 1,412 (161 women, 1,251 men). The number of prisoners considered seriously ill is 335 (230 of whom cannot survive on their own). The violations of the right to health here are as follows: examinations while handcuffed, lack of hygiene, and delayed transfers. In addition, the inhumane conditions of the transport vehicles stand out as another aspect of the attacks on sick prisoners.

In recent years, high-security S and Y type prisons have been put into operation, deepening the isolation of political prisoners. Prisoners and human rights defenders describe these structures as "well-type prisons." This name symbolizes both the physical structure and the intensity of isolation.

According to data from the Turkish Ministry of Justice, 32 new prisons were opened in 2021, 22 in 2022, and 16 in 2023.

Seven of these are S-type prisons and 14 are Y-type prisons. S-type prisons are located in Manavgat, Antalya, Bodrum, Iğdır, Kırşehir, Kavak, and Çarşamba; Y-type prisons are located in Adana Suluca, Aksaray, Antalya, Burdur, Erzurum, Kırşehir, Konya Ereğli, and Tekirdağ Karatepe. The Ministry of Justice states that these prisons were built for "those sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment and those detained or convicted of terrorist crimes." However, in practice, a large number of political prisoners are being exiled to these prisons on vague grounds such as "breaking discipline" or "displaying dangerous behavior."

This situation demonstrates that isolation has become not only a form of punishment but also a mechanism of political control.

Although the new high-security prisons have been "modernized" architecturally, they are structures where human contact is minimized, creating serious problems in terms of prisoners' right to life, right to health, and freedom of communication. According to reports: Prisoners' rights to open visits and telephone calls are restricted, letters are censored, and books are confiscated. Social activities have been almost completely eliminated. Psychological disorders (anxiety, depression, suicidal tendencies) caused by long-term isolation have reached serious proportions.

The "good behavior" assessments introduced by the 2020 amendment to the Execution of Sentences Law have become a tool to arbitrarily prevent the release of political prisoners. Since September 12, Turkey's prison system has evolved into a policy of deeper isolation and oppression. S and Y type prisons are the spatial expression of the state's strategy to control the opposition.

Isolation is more than a physical practice; it is an ideological tool aimed at destroying political identity and social solidarity.

CONCRETE PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED IN PRISONS

1. Isolation and Seclusion

The most fundamental problem experienced by political prisoners is the practice of isolation. Type F, S, and Y high-security prisons are architecturally designed to "minimize human contact." Prisoners held in single, double, or triple rooms spend most of the day alone, and their right to participate in communal activities is either completely removed or left to the arbitrary decisions of the administration. Solitary confinement causes serious psychological disorders in the long term. Isolation, loneliness, depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, and memory loss are common among political prisoners. This situation also coincides with the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture's (CPT) definition of "inhuman treatment."

2. Restriction of the Right to Communication and Contact

Political prisoners' contact with the outside world is constantly restricted. Letters are censored and sometimes not delivered at all on the grounds of "objectionable content." Family and lawyer visits are blocked under the pretext of "disciplinary punishment." The right to telephone calls is limited to once a week for 10 minutes in many prisons. These practices both worsen the psychological state of prisoners and effectively eliminate their right to defense.

3. Violations of the Right to Health

Access to healthcare in prisons is a serious problem. Political prisoners are often not referred to hospitals or are subjected to shackled examinations during referral. For many prisoners with chronic illnesses, medication is delayed, and dietary and treatment conditions are not provided. According to reports by the Human Rights Association (IHD) and the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TIHV), as of 2024, there are over 600 sick prisoners, 70 of whom are in critical condition. This situation demonstrates the systematic violation of the right to health.

4. Barriers to Accessing Books, Publications, and Thought

Political prisoners' right to read and write is also severely restricted. Books and magazines with political content are banned on the grounds of "organization propaganda." Censorship is applied in prison libraries, making it virtually impossible to access certain publications. Letters, poems, or writings composed by prisoners are often deemed "objectionable" and not sent outside. This situation is not only an individual rights violation but also a systematic form of pressure on freedom of expression.

5. Arbitrary Disciplinary Penalties and Release Barriers

With the amendments made to the Enforcement Law in 2020, the release of political prisoners began to be arbitrarily postponed under the name of "good behavior assessment." The subjective assessments of the administration and observation boards, such as "showing no remorse" or "not rehabilitated," have caused many political prisoners to exceed their legal release period. Furthermore, even the slightest demand for rights or protest is considered a "disciplinary offense" and used as grounds for solitary confinement or transfer to another prison.

6. Specific Problems Experienced by Female Political Prisoners

Women prisoners are subjected to double discrimination due to both their gender and their political identity. Issues such as forced strip searches, restrictions on access to hygiene products, and the lack of female psychologists or doctors are frequently reported. Female prisoners are also made invisible within the male-dominated prison culture, and the gender-based violence they are subjected to often goes unpunished.

7. Exile Transfers and Severing of Family Ties

Political prisoners are often arbitrarily "exiled" to prisons in different cities. This practice makes family visits impossible and makes it difficult for prisoners to continuously rebuild their prison life. Some prisoners have been transferred to different provinces four or five times in a few years. This clearly constitutes a violation of the right to family unity.

PROBLEMS FACED BY LGBT PRISONERS IN PRISONS

Prisons in Turkey are one of the institutions where social inequalities are most visibly experienced. This situation has even more severe consequences for LGBT+ prisoners who face discrimination due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

LGBTI+ prisoners are often held alone in cell-like areas for "protection" from other prisoners. However, this practice effectively amounts to solitary confinement and leads to the prisoner's complete isolation from social life. In some prisons, LGBT+ prisoners are placed in male wards, exposing them to the risk of violence, harassment, and sexual assault. In such cases, authorities often cite the reason that "other prisoners may be disturbed," which constitutes a clear example of institutional homophobia.

LGBTQ+ prisoners may be subjected to verbal, physical, and sexual violence by both staff and other prisoners. Insults, derogatory language, "forced searches," and strip searches have been frequently reported, especially for trans women prisoners. Such practices constitute both inhuman treatment and a clear violation of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

One of the most critical issues for trans prisoners is the denial of access to healthcare related to gender affirmation. Prisoners undergoing hormone

therapy often have their medication denied or arbitrarily cut off. Furthermore, LGBT+ prisoners' requests for psychological support are either rejected or postponed on the grounds that no suitable specialist is available. This inequality in access to the healthcare system seriously jeopardizes prisoners' physical and mental health.

Trans prisoners face the problem of their identities not being recognized by prison authorities unless the name or gender information in their population records is changed. This situation leads to trans women who should be placed in women's prisons being sent to men's prisons, thereby exposing them to a direct risk of violence. Furthermore, the failure to use the prisoner's preferred name or pronoun constitutes a constant form of identity denial.

In many prisons, LGBT+ prisoners are unable to participate in workshops, courses, sports, or educational activities on the grounds of "security." This practice effectively eliminates the right to rehabilitation and preparation for social life. In some prisons, the hours during which LGBT+ prisoners are allowed to access common areas are even different from those of other prisoners—this both reinforces stigmatization and increases social isolation.

Social support mechanisms for LGBT+ prisoners in prisons are virtually non-existent. As civil society organizations have limited access to prisons, prisoners are often left alone. LGBT+ prisoners who are allowed visits may also be excluded by their families, which deepens their psychological distress. As a result, many LGBT+ prisoners are forced to live under the threat of suicide.

IN CONCLUSION;

The pressure, torture, and isolation practices experienced in prisons should be seen not only as affecting prisoners but also as part of the restriction of the democratic rights and freedoms of the entire society. However, historically, both internal and external forms of resistance have created powerful examples of struggle against these pressure policies. Looking at the history of Turkish prisons, we see that prisoners have protested against rights violations through hunger strikes, death fasts, and mass protests. These actions are not merely a "physical resistance," but also a means of making visible the violations that the state has rendered

invisible. We must support the struggles of political prisoners through collective solidarity, legal appeals, and public pressure. Joint petitions organized among prisoners, signature campaigns, and letter solidarity networks established with the outside world will both provide moral support and facilitate the documentation of rights violations. This method will keep human contact and collective will alive, especially under conditions of isolation. Every solidarity network developed against isolation, censorship, discrimination, and torture will both defend human dignity and shed light on the dark areas of fascism.

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