

Gender Discrimination in Turkmenistan

Rights and Freedoms of Turkmen Citizens /
Turkmen Yurt TV

2018/2019



Background

The organization "Rights and Freedoms of Turkmen Citizens" was established in the Czech Republic in 2016. Our organization covers various areas of human rights violations, including the violation of women rights and discrimination against women.

Despite how closed the Turkmen regime is and the refusal to provide information about violations of women's rights by the authorities', citizens of the country send us complaints and evidence of violations of women's rights.

Some of the violations presented in our report are confirmed by other human rights organizations working with Turkmenistan. It is important to note that members of our organization have personal experience of working with both state authorities of Turkmenistan and citizens whose rights have been violated. In fact the founding members of our organization are women who had first hand experience with violation of their gender rights in Turkmenistan.

Information provided in our report is based on intel from Turkmenistan: provided to us from citizens whose rights were violated, and from representatives of government as well. For the security purposes of our sources, we will not disclose their names.

Methodology

Despite the adoption of the Law of Turkmenistan No. 264-V of August 18, 2015, "The State Guarantees for the Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Women and Men" (hereinafter the Law). The situation of women's rights in Turkmenistan to date remains unacceptable. Below are the facts of discrimination against women in Turkmenistan:

1. Ensuring the rights of women in marriage and family relations.

According to article 3 of the Law, the state guarantees to women and men, upon reaching the marriageable age established by the legislation of Turkmenistan, an equal right to create a family. However the state creates obstacles to girls of legal age and women wishing to marry a foreign citizen.

An instance that has been brought to our attention is by a young girl from Turkmenistan who wants to marry a Turkish citizen. She notified us that to do this, she must provide the following documents to the marriage registration authorities: a certificate stating that she is not married in Turkmenistan, as well as a certified birth certificate. The only way for her to do so, is by returning to Turkmenistan to obtain these documents. In other words, the documents must be received in person. Our observations indicate that it is now a common practice that as soon as a citizen wishing to receive the above-mentioned documents returns to the country and receives these documents, when leaving the country, the citizen is detained by

special services officers. This is also the case with the above mentioned individual. When the girl tried leaving the country with all the necessary documents, special service officers began interrogating her, as to why she has collected the documents, and why does she want to marry a Turkish citizen and not a Turkmen. As a result, the girl was subsequently removed from her trip and placed on the black list of individuals that are not allowed to leave the country. Thus, violating the woman's right to privacy, namely, to choose a spouse (to decide on her own with whom she wants to create a family). Such scenarios have been occurring in Turkmenistan with a numerous amount of women.

2. Discrimination based on sex.

According to Article 26 of the Law, women are guaranteed protection of their rights on the basis of sex. In Turkmenistan, police officers and special service officers, conduct a forced gynecological examination of young girls for the presence of a hymen, on a regular basis. After this, in case of finding the fact that the girls virginity is not preserved, the girl and her parents are summoned to a public assembly, where they are publicly subjected to humiliation and censure. In order to avoid public humiliation, girls perform an operation for hymenoplasty, there have also been cases of suicide as a result of such actions from the authorities.

3. Discrimination on the basis of nationality.

According to Article 3 of the Law, women are guaranteed equal rights regardless of nationality. However, in Turkmenistan there is a mass oppression of women with non-Turkmen surnames as well as non Turkmen nationalities. Budget organizations as well as government positions have blunt evidence of the exclusion of women, with non Turkmen nationalities. There is a growing evidence that women that are of non turkmen nationalities are strictly prohibited from holding executive positions in budget organizations.

There are also more and more cases of oppression of the Russian-speaking, to be more exact, non-Turkmen population, especially on the propaganda websites organized by the country's special services. On these websites degrading and libelous offensive articles are published targeting race and gender. One of the main propaganda websites is gundogar-news.com. This website also writes anti-Semitic articles against Jewish women. The state pursues a policy against women of non Turkmen ethnicity. These women are also accused of immoral behavior, incest, etc.

4. Discrimination of the right to participate in government, discrimination in the freedom to choose clothing and appearance.

According to Article 16 of the Law, women are guaranteed the right to participate in government. Indeed, in Turkmenistan, Turkmen women occupy leading posts. For example, the chairman of the country's Parliament is a woman. However, in

practice, these women only create the appearance of the participation of women in government. The reality is that women are totally prohibited from making any high level decisions. Moreover, presently, new restrictions on appearance are adopted for women working in budget organizations. All women are required to wear only national clothes, cover their heads with a handkerchief and under their dress they are required to wear balak (Turkmen national pants). It is the case, that when a woman comes to a government office, a body check for the presence of such pants under the dress is carried out. Women are also forbidden to dye their hair in light colors (blond color), have nail extensions and cover nails with nail polish. The authorities of the country also have a tight control on the import of materials to Turkmenistan for carrying out the above procedures.

5. Discrimination of female convicts in correctional colonies.

Women in penitentiary institutions in Turkmenistan are subject to the most severe discrimination. In the penitentiary system of Turkmenistan, a woman who has entered a penal colony simply ceases to be considered a person.

From the point of entry into the correctional colony, a woman is immediately physically abused by prison staff. For example: O. Meredova (the name was changed for reasons of convict's safety, since she is currently in prison) was beaten to such an extent that her jaw was broken. The woman was not provided medical help to fix her jaw. Other convicts upon their arrival in the colony were forced to completely undress, and walk in one dress without underwear, sometime up until a meeting date with the relatives would be allowed. In the event that the authorities

or employees of the prison consider that the convict has committed an offense (which most of the time is fabricated), the woman is sent to a cold locker, in which there is nothing but the concrete floor.

When serving a sentence in the punishment cell, the convict is forced to remove her underwear (if it has not been removed prior already). There is also coercion of cohabitation of convicts with the chief or employees of the prison. All the women in prison are required to follow a strict dress code of having black head scarves on their heads.

Recommendations

1. Stop creating obstacles to girls wishing to marry foreign citizens.
2. Promote the employment of women with non-Turkmen surnames and non-Turkmen nationality in budget organizations, including executive positions.
3. Stop putting pressure on women and give them the opportunity to dress, and have the appearance they want. Also stop compulsory dressing of the national dress.
4. Stop the forcible gynecological examinations of girls in the country.
5. Stop using women in leading positions in the government as a showcase for the international community. Allow women leaders to make decisions and really participate in government activities.
6. Demand from the government of the country inadmissibility of publishing articles of anti-Semitic content and accusing women of non-Turkmen nationality of immoral behavior.

7. Stop the physical abuse in correctional colonies.
8. Condemn and investigate the sexual harassment carried out by the head and officers of the women's correctional colonies.
9. Provide timely medical assistance to women prisoners.
10. Stop the practice of underwear removal in the women prisons.