



**\*\*Submission to the UN Committee Against Torture\*\***

**\*\*80th CAT Session (8th July - 26th July 2024)\***

**\*\*Focus Country: TURKEY\*\***

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**Subject: Politically Motivated Systematic Torture in Turkey and Its Implications for Safeguards Against Torture**

## **Introduction**

This submission is presented to the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) for its 80th session, during which Turkey's compliance with the Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) will be reviewed. The submission highlights how politically motivated systematic torture in Turkey undermines legal safeguards against torture, based on the findings of the London Advocacy report.

## **Context and Background**

Since the failed coup attempt in 2016, the Turkish government has engaged in a systematic campaign of repression against various groups, including perceived Gülenists and Kurdish individuals. This has included arbitrary detention, imprisonment, and harassment, particularly targeting those accused of terrorism-related offenses. These actions violate international legal standards, including the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT).

## **Key Issues and Concerns**

### **1. Widespread Torture and Ill-Treatment**

- Numerous credible reports document widespread torture and ill-treatment in Turkey, especially in police custody and prisons. Victims report severe beatings, sexual violence, electric shocks, waterboarding, and other forms of physical and psychological abuse.
- Torture occurs not only in official detention centres but also in informal locations such as sports centres and transportation vehicles.

### **2. Impunity and Lack of Investigations**

- There is a severe disconnect between government policies and their implementation. Despite numerous allegations of torture, investigations and prosecutions are rare, creating a perception of de facto impunity.

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- Reports from international bodies, including the European Commission and the United Nations, indicate a lack of effective investigations into allegations of torture and ill-treatment.

### **3. Overcrowding and Poor Conditions in Prisons**

- Turkish prisons are severely overcrowded, with a prison population exceeding 320,000 as of August 2022. This makes Turkey the country with the highest overcrowding rate in Europe.
- Conditions in prisons are deplorable, with reports of arbitrary restrictions, denial of medical care, mistreatment, and solitary confinement.

### **4. Intimidation and Harassment of Detainees**

- Detainees, especially those perceived as affiliated with the Gülen movement, face harassment and abuse. This includes unnecessary strip searches, solitary confinement, denial of access to legal and medical services, and degrading treatment by prison guards.

### **5. Targeting of Vulnerable Groups**

- Women, particularly those associated with accused men, are often detained under baseless charges and subjected to torture and ill-treatment. There are also reports of forced medical procedures and denial of proper medical care for detainees.

### **Implications for Compliance with UNCAT**

The systematic torture and ill-treatment in Turkey directly contravene several articles of the UNCAT:

- **Article 2:** Failure to prevent acts of torture and lack of safeguards to protect those at risk.
- **Article 12:** Inadequate investigation of allegations of torture and ill-treatment due to the repression of legal professionals.
- **Article 13:** Intimidation and harassment of lawyers prevent individuals from seeking legal recourse for torture and ill-treatment.
- **Article 16:** The broader pattern of repression contributes to inhumane and degrading treatment, undermining the overall framework of protections against torture.

### **Recommendations**

**We kindly ask Committee to make the following recommendations to Türkiye:**

- 1. Ensure Judicial Independence:** Guarantee the independence of the judiciary and prosecution services in accordance with international standards.
- 2. Amend Anti-Terror Legislation:** Revise anti-terrorism laws to prevent their misuse against individuals and ensure compliance with international human rights standards.

**3. Protect Detainees from Harassment and Reprisal:** Implement measures to protect detainees from arbitrary arrest, prosecution, and detention, and ensure they can perform their duties without intimidation.

**4. Improve Prison Conditions:** Address the issue of overcrowding in prisons and ensure that conditions meet international human rights standards.

**5. Investigate Torture Allegations:** Ensure prompt, thorough, and impartial investigations into all allegations of torture and ill-treatment and hold perpetrators accountable.

**6. Comply with International Rulings:** Adhere to rulings from the European Court of Human Rights and other international bodies regarding the protection of detainees and the prevention of torture.

## Conclusion

The systematic torture and ill-treatment in Turkey severely undermine the legal safeguards against torture and ill-treatment, contravening Turkey's obligations under the Convention Against Torture. We urge the Committee to address these concerns in its review and to press Turkey to take immediate and effective measures to restore the rule of law and protect the rights of individuals against torture.

## Human Rights Solidarity

### Appendix and Further Information

1. Report: Politically Motivated Systematic Torture in Turkey and Its Survivors  
For the full published report: [https://www.londonadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Report-on-Systematic-Torture-in-Turkey\\_December2022.pdf](https://www.londonadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Report-on-Systematic-Torture-in-Turkey_December2022.pdf)
2. Human Rights Solidarity: <https://www.hrsolidarity.org/>
3. Torture Victim's Quotes from report

Interviewee 1: there were 12-15 people in a tiny cell that was no more than 6 square metres; “You could hardly stand in the room, let alone sleep”, he said. “In the cell, the lights were always on” ... “[They] came into our cell every day and threatened to kill us, [they were] swearing and calling us traitors.”

Interviewee 2: “There were 4 policemen in civilian clothes. They were constantly putting psychological pressure on me with their harsh words, and they were threatening me with violence to my family. Even though I didn't have a lawyer, they made me sign my statement as if I had a lawyer.”

Interviewee 3: “There were constant insults. Going to the toilet was a challenge. It was very, very difficult to pray. They only gave me spoiled chips, stale bread, and water. The wards were very crowded, but the ladies' ward was more cramped”

Interviewee 4: “[another victim] was handcuffed with barbed and razor wires which cut into his bone and was given an electric shock. He was tortured at the Turkish Air Force’s headquarters.”

Interviewee 6: “The police blindfolded me. Then they put a garbage bag on my head. I thought about resisting them, but I couldn't do anything out of fear because I didn't know how they would react. After putting the bag on my head, he wrapped it around my neck several times. I was breathing but after a while, the bag stuck to my face. He kept saying ‘give me a name’, I think they did it to scare me.”

Interviewee 10: “They took my pants down to give the impression that they were going to rape me. He beat me with his fists and I soon fainted.”

**Human Rights Solidarity (HRS), a UK-based registered charity, is driven by individuals from immigrant and refugee backgrounds, focusing on promoting and defending human rights. With a mission to educate and empower new generations of tech-savvy human rights defenders, HRS engages in various activities including advocacy, legal support, educational webinars, and cultural events to raise awareness and facilitate access to rights, especially for marginalized communities like refugees and migrants in the UK. The organization also aids in reintegrating immigrant legal professionals and human rights activists into their fields, while its volunteer team of activists, lawyers, and educators works to create inclusive and supportive environments for rights education and advocacy.**