



# **The Religious freedoms in Turkey... Ink on paper**

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**Report of the Forum for Development and Human Rights  
Dialogue**



According to the Turkish Constitution, which considers Turkey a secular state, it guarantees freedom of religion, belief, freedom of expression, and worship, and article 24 prohibits discrimination on any religious grounds and prohibits the misuse of religious feelings, or objects deemed sacred by religion.

According to article 136 of the Turkish Constitution, the department of religious affairs in Turkey is the Directorate of Religious Affairs of the Prime Minister's Office, established in 1924, instead of the supreme religious authority (Sheikh of Islam).

Nevertheless, freedom of religion and belief in Turkey is subject to many violations, as the Turkish regime led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, intervenes in religious practices, as well as the Turkish regime's sponsorship of religious intolerance against Christians to the extent that Christianity is on the verge of extinction in the country, and it is noted that there is a marked increase in incidents of vandalism and community violence against religious members of minorities.

Churches, monasteries, and places of worship have been used for other purposes and purposes, for example, many church schools in Diyarbakir have been converted into other areas such as carpet workshops, known to contain 36 churches.

We note this as follows:

- The Turkish regime has exploited the two-year state of emergency since the alleged coup and launched the largest arrest campaign in the country's history, involving various sectors of the country along with the private sector, resulting in the arrest of 35,000 people and the dismissal of more than 175,000 state officials, including judges, academics, journalists, military and security personnel, doctors and teachers, while more than 80,000 people are in pretrial detention.
- Turkey has closed the Greek Orthodox Theological Institute, and the Turkish government claims that the reason for its closure is the Greek government's inability to guarantee the religious freedom of its Turkish Muslim minority.
- An increase in hate speech during Christmas holidays against some Protestant churches, and against the media investigating certain places of



worship, to sow fear among believers who wished to attend the celebrations on the occasion.

- The Turkish regime pursued a policy of unjustified interference in the internal affairs of religious communities by preventing the election of board members to non-Muslim institutions and introducing new restrictions on the long-awaited elections of the Patriarch of the Armenian apostolic church.
- In November 2019, a Turkish Supreme Court issued a decision allowing the Chora Kariye Museum, a former Greek Orthodox church, to be converted back into a mosque.
- Churches such as the Costolo's Church in Malaita, the Church of Balekser, and the Kadikoy International Church (Istanbul) were attacked, windows were broken, and offensive drawings and scribbling were painted on their walls. .
- In March 2017, threats were sent to Radio Shima in Ankara, killing a Christian broadcaster, and since then, the station and its director have received greater police protection.
- In February 2018, a homemade bomb was planted in the garden of a Catholic church in Tarpon.
- On December 7, 2017, a priest and a clergyman at the Protestant Church in the Balekser region received death threats.
- The three courtyards used by the Protestant Church as its garden, as well as twelve shops owned by the Chaldean Church, the Diyarbakir Cultural House, and several properties belonging to the Armenian Church, were seized as part of the nationalization of Sur.
- Violation of the religious freedom of Alawites, the country's largest religious minorities, as they are still unable to obtain official recognition of their places of worship (cemevleri) despite a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) confirming that these policies violate the rights of Alawites, as well as the holy places of Alawites in The Province of Sivas, was severely damaged and vandalized after the government issued mining permits to the surrounding area.
- In 2019, Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek religious and cultural sites faced serious damage or destruction in some cases due to negligence, vandalism, or state-approved construction projects.



- In 2019, President Erdogan repeatedly called for the transformation of the Hagia Sophia Museum of the Greek Orthodox Church into a mosque.

## **Recommendations**

- 1 .The Dialogue Forum for Development and Human Rights Foundation calls on Mr. Ahmed Shahid to carry out his mandate as special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief at the United Nations, to implement its commitments through Human Rights Council Resolution 6/37, and to investigate the systematic persecution of religious minorities by the Turkish regime and its dissemination of religious intolerance throughout the country.
- 2 .Identify existing and emerging obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief, and ways to overcome those obstacles; continue its efforts to examine government facts and actions that are contrary to the provisions of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on religion or belief, and recommend remedial measures as appropriate.
- 3 .The Foundation calls on the Special Rapporteur to conduct country visits to Turkey to investigate the facts, submit his report to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, and work to stop these systematic violations against religious freedoms due to the practices of the Turkish government because of its feeding of intolerance and hatred against the other.

