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Human Rights Situation in Turkey

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The Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has strong Islamist roots, has ruled Turkey since November 2002. During these fifteen-and-a-half years, the Turkish government has had a very mixed record on freedom of religion or belief; these freedoms have shown slight improvement in some areas while they deteriorated in many others. There has, however, been an alarming lack of respect for fundamental rights and freedoms across the board since the abortive coup of July 2016, and the ensuing state of emergency, which the government recently extended for the seventh time.

Turkey's Mixed Track Record

Historically, Turkey's shortcomings concerning freedom of religion or belief stem from two main causes: 1) the country's *sui generis* understanding of secularism, and 2) the prevalence of hostile attitudes toward religious minorities.

Turkey is nominally a secular republic. In 1928, four-and-a-half years after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the article stipulating Islam as the state religion was removed from the Constitution. Nine years later, the principle of secularism (*laiklik*) was introduced to the Constitution. Secularism is currently enshrined in the Constitution's preamble as well as Articles 2, 13, 14, 68, 81, 103, 136, and 174. However, most Turkish politicians and voters across the political spectrum fail to perceive secularism as "separation of mosque and state" and freedom both "for and from" religion. Rather, the term continues to be perceived and implemented as "the state's control over religion." In practice, this peculiar understanding has resulted in a sectarian regime based on the Hanafi rite of Sunni Islam, in which the government's preferred and privileged form of faith dominates all other faiths and confessions.

The widespread negative perception of and hostile attitude toward religious minorities continue to be one of the leading threats to freedom of religion or belief in Turkey. For the most part, religious minorities are either perceived as "fifth columns" acting on behalf of Turkey's enemies, or conducive to foreign meddling, and hence seen as suspect. Furthermore, as a result of an attitude that is a relic of Turkey's Ottoman past, religious minorities are perceived as "subjects" to be "tolerated" and treated with "benevolence" rather than as equal citizens with equal rights.

There is also a prevalent perception of religious minorities as "hostages" since religious minorities, even if they are Turkish citizens, are still considered to be foreign. This often leads to either slips of the tongue on the part of Turkish officials, who refer to them as foreigners, or instances in which officials treat them as hostages to be traded.¹ For example, the Turkish government has made a commitment to opening the Halki Seminary, the main theology school of the Ecumenical Patriarchate located in Istanbul, in exchange for the Greek government opening the first mosque in Athens.² Turkey's religious minorities have spoken out against such demeaning treatment. In 2006, for example, over 100 members of Turkey's religious minorities signed a joint declaration stating that they are not "hostages."³

The problematic premises of Turkey's existing regime of mosque-state relations have led to a patchy track record concerning freedom of religion or belief. On the one hand, elected officials and civil servants have been guilty of systematic discrimination and egregious hate speech targeting religious minorities as part of

¹ "Rethinking the State of Minorities in Greek-Turkish Relations in Light of European Integration," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* (Turkey), Vol. 9, No. 3, pages 83-94. (http://turkishpolicy.com/pdf/vol_9-no_3-tekin.pdf)

² "Turkey ready to open Halki Seminary in return for a mosque in Greece: report," *Hürriyet Daily News* (Turkey), March 8, 2015. (<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-ready-to-open-halki-seminary-in-return-for-a-mosque-in-greece-report-82155>)

³ İsmail Saymaz, "Azınlıklar bildirisi: Rehine değiliz (Minority declaration: We are not hostages)," *Radikal* (Turkey), September 26, 2006. (<http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/azinliklar-bildirisi-rehine-degiliz-792832/>)

an alarming trend of scapegoating of, and incitement against, religious minorities.⁴ On the other hand, an interest in improving Turkey's tarnished image abroad has led to a limited number of positive, albeit incomplete, steps to remedy long-running grievances. The Turkish government, through well-choreographed steps, is particularly enthusiastic to showcase globally its benevolence toward, and tolerance of, certain religious minorities, particularly Jews and Christians. Paradoxically, such patronizing and condescending treatment of religious minorities ends up presenting an obstacle to the institutionalization of a framework based on equal citizenship, pluralism, and social inclusion.

Positive Steps

Despite various overall shortcomings, several positive gestures deserve commendation. The gradual, albeit incomplete, restitution of properties expropriated from religious minority communities has been an important step in the right direction.⁵ The General Directorate of Foundations has also started funding the restoration of a number of churches and synagogues.⁶ The funding, however, often comes with strings attached, as state officials want to have a say as to not only who can perform religious services in restored buildings, but also when.⁷

As the number of Orthodox citizens has fallen to some 3,000 in Turkey, Ankara has also started providing dual citizenship to Orthodox archbishops to facilitate the election of the next ecumenical patriarch, since the Turkish law stipulates the patriarch to be a Turkish citizen.⁸

In December 2008, Turkey became the first Muslim-majority country to attain observer status in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.⁹ Since 2011, Turkey has held International Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies attended by Turkish officials.¹⁰ In 2015, for the first time in Turkish history, Hanukkah was celebrated at a public square in Istanbul with the participation of state officials.¹¹

In March 2016, Turkey started replacing official identity cards that showed religious affiliation with biometric cards that retain religious affiliation data not in print but only in an embedded chip.¹² The limited

⁴ Aykan Erdemir, "Coup Attempt Sparks Backlash Against Turkey's Minorities," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, August 19, 2016. (<http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/dr-aykan-erdemir-coup-attempt-sparks-backlash-against-turkeys-minorities>)

⁵ Mine Yıldırım, "What does Turkey's Restitution Decree mean?" *Forum 18* (Norway), October 6, 2011. (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1621)

⁶ "Turkey has restored 14 churches, one synagogue since 2003," *Hürriyet Daily News* (Turkey), December 23, 2017. (<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-has-restored-14-churches-one-synagogue-since-2003-124639>)

⁷ Yair Rosenberg, "Turkish Governor Threatens to Turn Synagogue into Museum," *Tablet*, November 24, 2014. (<http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/187203/turkish-governor-threatens-to-turn-synagogue-into-museum>)

⁸ Ayla Jean Yackley, "Turkey offers citizenship to Orthodox archbishops," *Reuters*, July 21, 2010. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-50289820100721>)

⁹ International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, accessed April 25, 2018. (<http://2015.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us/history-of-ihra/2008>)

¹⁰ "Yahudi soykırımına Neve Şalom'da anma, (Holocaust remembrance at Neve Shalom)," *Milliyet* (Turkey), January 28, 2011. (<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yahudi-soykirimina-neve-salom-da-anma-gundem-1345011>)

¹¹ Nilay Vardar, "Hanukkah Celebrated at Public Square First Time in Turkey," *Bianet* (Turkey), December 14, 2015. (<http://bianet.org/english/people/170132-hanukkah-celebrated-at-public-square-first-time-in-turkey>)

¹² "Distribution of biometric Turkish ID cards begins," *Hürriyet Daily News* (Turkey), March 23, 2016. (<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/distribution-of-biometric-turkish-id-cards-begins-96822>)

revision to the school curriculum to include the Alevi faith in religion classes¹³ and the lifting of the ban on hijab in the Turkish civil service¹⁴ have also been steps in the right direction.

The Consequences of Turkey's Failed Coup

Turkey's abortive coup of July 2016 and the ensuing state of emergency, however, have been disastrous for freedom of religion or belief in the country, overshadowing the small gains made earlier. Turkey's draconian state of emergency has undermined human rights, the rule of law, due process, and attorney-client privilege, precipitating a toxic climate especially for Turkey's vulnerable groups.

Although Turkey's religious minorities were quick to demonstrate their loyalty to their homeland in the immediate aftermath of the failed coup attempt, they still became victims of a wave of hatred and violence for their supposed "complicity" in the coup. The day after the abortive attempt, the religious leaders of the Jewish, Armenian, Greek-Orthodox, and Syriac communities denounced it in a joint declaration,¹⁵ joined later by representatives of the Alevi¹⁶ and Shiite¹⁷ faiths. These gestures, however, did not suffice to shield them from the rising anti-minority sentiment of government supporters.

On August 7, in a demonstration of solidarity, Turkey's Jewish and Christian religious leaders joined the "Democracy and Martyrs" rally, the government's million-strong anti-coup demonstration in Istanbul.¹⁸ In denouncing the coup plotters, however, three of the officials who spoke at rally insulted religious minorities by tarring the plotters as "seeds of Byzantium," "crusaders," and as a "flock of infidels."¹⁹

There has been an alarming trend among pro-government media to connect the coup plot to religious minorities. A pro-government journalist insisted two days after the abortive coup that Fethullah Gülen – a U.S.-based Sunni cleric who is widely considered by the Turkish public to be the coup's mastermind²⁰ – has a Jewish mother and an Armenian father, and is a member of the Catholic clerical hierarchy.²¹ Another pro-government daily even published a fabricated Vatican passport to show that Gülen was a Catholic

¹³ "Turkish Alevis release list of suggestions for 'pluralistic' religious education in new curriculum," *Hürriyet Daily News* (Turkey), February 1, 2017. (<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-alevis-release-list-of-suggestions-for-pluralistic-religious-education-in-new-curriculum-109205>)

¹⁴ Patrick Kingsley, "Turkey Allows Women in Military to Wear Hijabs, in Cultural Shift," *The New York Times*, February 22, 2017. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/22/world/middleeast/hijab-turkey-military.html>)

¹⁵ "Religious leaders stand together against coup attempt in Turkey," *Hürriyet Daily News* (Turkey), July 16, 2016. (<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/religious-leaders-stand-together-against-coup-attempt-in-turkey-101690>)

¹⁶ "Tek çıkış yolu demokrasi (Democracy is the only way out)," *Cumhuriyet* (Turkey), July 16, 2016. (http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/568631/Tek_cikis_yolu_demokrasi.html)

¹⁷ "Halkın İradesine Darbeye Hayır (No to coup against the people's will)," *Caferi ve Ehl-i Beyt Derneği* (Turkey), July 21, 2016. (<http://www.ehlibeytder.com/kursumuz/halkin-iradesine-darbeye-hayir-h3712.html>)

¹⁸ "United we stood for a hopeful tomorrow," *Şalom* (Turkey), August 11, 2016.

(<http://www.salom.com.tr/SalomTurkey/haber-100144-united-we-stood-for-a-hopeful-tomorrow.html>)

¹⁹ Pinar Tremblay, "Is Gulen an Armenian?" *Al-Monitor*, August 12, 2016.

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20170930061900/https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ru/contents/articles/originals/2016/08/turkey-is-fethullah-gulen-armenian.html>)

²⁰ "Most Turks believe a secretive Muslim sect was behind the failed coup," *The Economist*, July 28, 2016.

(<https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21703186-president-erdogan-blames-gulenists-putsch-and-has-launched-massive-purges-most-turks>)

²¹ Can Kemal Özer, "Şerefli Milletin Yiğit Evlatları Tarih Yazdı (Brave Sons of Honorable Nation Have Made History)," *Yeni Söz* (Turkey), July 17, 2016. (<http://www.yenisoz.com.tr/serefli-milletin-yigit-evlatlari-tarih-yazdi-makale-14422>)

cardinal.²² The Greek-Orthodox ecumenical patriarch was slandered for “plotting” the coup with the CIA,²³ while another pro-government columnist claimed that the plotters may be hiding in churches.²⁴ Unsurprisingly, it was not long before incitement led to physical attacks against religious minorities.

Churches in Malatya and Trabzon – the scenes of lethal attacks against Christians a decade ago²⁵ – were the first to be targeted.²⁶ Later, an Armenian high school in Istanbul was vandalized.²⁷ An Alevi worship hall there and homes in Malatya were next,²⁸ and Christian tourists were harassed in Gaziantep.²⁹

Attacks against religious minorities have remained at the elevated level reached shortly after the failed coup. On March 6 this year, a lone gunman fired a shot through the window of the Saint Maria Catholic Church in Trabzon, a city on Turkey’s Black Sea coast.³⁰ This is the fifth confirmed attack against the church since the assassination of its priest Andrea Santoro in 2006.³¹ Saint Maria was one of the churches targeted in the immediate aftermath of the failed coup attempt, as mobs attacked its gates with hammers and broke its windows.³²

In February 2018, an incendiary device damaged Saint Maria’s front door a day ahead of the anniversary of Father Santoro’s assassination.³³ Bishop Paolo Bizzeti, who assumed office as the vicar apostolic of Anatolia in 2015³⁴ – a seat vacant since the murder of his predecessor Bishop Luigi Padovese in 2010³⁵ –

²² “Feto’ya kardinal pasaportu verildi (A cardinal’s passport was issued to Feto),” *Takvim* (Turkey), October 8, 2016, (<https://www.takvim.com.tr/guncel/2016/10/08/fetoya-kardinal-pasaportu-verildi>)

²³ “Turkish press accuses Bartholomew of complicity in failed coup,” *Vatican Insider* (Italy), September 1, 2016. (<http://www.lastampa.it/2016/09/01/vaticaninsider/eng/world-news/turkish-press-accuses-bartholomew-of-complicity-in-failed-coup-nSsFIRHaikPpZTR7YQSLO/pagina.html>)

²⁴ Ersoy Dede, “Firari general, kayıp G3’ler! (Fugitive general, missing G3s!),” *Star* (Turkey), August 3, 2016. (<http://www.star.com.tr/yazar/firari-general-kayip-g3ler-yazi-1130644>)

²⁵ “Turkey: churches targeted during attempted coup,” *World Watch Monitor*, July 19, 2016. (<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/07/turkey-churches-targeted-during-attempted-coup>)

²⁶ “Church attacks in Trabzon and Malatya,” *Agos* (Turkey), July 18, 2016. (<http://www.agos.com.tr/en/article/15936/church-attacks-in-trabzon-and-malatya>)

²⁷ Miran Manukyan, “Tibrevank’ın duvarına ırkçı yazı (Racist graffiti on Tibrevank’s wall),” *Agos* (Turkey), August 13, 2016. (<http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/16213/tibrevankin-duvarina-irkci-yazi>)

²⁸ “Tension rises in eastern Turkish province amid reports of march on Alevi neighborhoods,” *Hürriyet Daily News* (Turkey), July 18, 2016. (<http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/tension-rises-in-eastern-turkish-province-amid-reports-of-march-on-alevi-neighborhoods-101758>)

²⁹ “Gaziantep’te Uzakdoğulu turistlere ‘tepki’: Müslümanları Hristiyan yapıyorsunuz, gavurlar! (‘Reaction’ to Far Eastern tourists in Gaziantep: You infidels are converting Muslims to Christians!),” *Diken* (Turkey), August 18, 2016. (<http://www.diken.com.tr/gaziantep-te-uzakdogulu-turistlere-tepki-muslumanlari-hristiyan-yapiyorsunuz-gavurlar>)

³⁰ “Attack on Saint Maria Catholic Church in Trabzon,” *Bianet* (Turkey), March 7, 2018. (<http://m.bianet.org/english/minorities/194935-attack-on-saint-maria-catholic-church-in-trabzon>)

³¹ “Catholic Priest Shot, Killed at Church in Turkey,” *Fox News*, February 5, 2006. (<http://www.foxnews.com/story/2006/02/05/catholic-priest-shot-killed-at-church-in-turkey.html>)

³² “Church attacks in Malatya and Trabzon,” *Agos* (Turkey), July 18, 2016. (<http://www.agos.com.tr/en/article/15936/church-attacks-in-trabzon-and-malatya>)

³³ “Turchia, ordigno incendiario contro la chiesa di don Andrea Santoro a Trabzon (Turkey, incendiary bomb against the church of Father Andrea Santoro in Trabzon),” *Vatican Insider* (Italy), February 7, 2018. (<http://www.lastampa.it/2018/02/07/vaticaninsider/ita/nel-mondo/turchia-ordigno-incendiario-contro-la-chiesa-di-don-andrea-santoro-a-trabzon-YIRbJzWJPDdOcOMEYZC50K/pagina.html>)

³⁴ “Turkey, the Pope: the Jesuit Bizzeti in the office that belonged to Padovese,” *Vatican Insider* (Italy), August 14, 2015. (<http://www.lastampa.it/2015/08/14/vaticaninsider/eng/world-news/turkey-the-pope-the-jesuit-bizzeti-in-the-office-that-belonged-to-padovese-ZqnciZ8f0z8JPMQjd0JL3N/pagina.html>)

³⁵ Rachel Donadio, “Catholic Bishop Stabbed in Turkey,” *The New York Times*, June 3, 2010. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/04/world/europe/04bishop.html>)

referred to the arson attempt as “one of the many episodes of intimidation and vandalism that affect the Trabzon church every week.”³⁶ Bizzeti complained about assailants who regularly damage the gates and desecrate church grounds with trash.³⁷ When Trabzon’s local media published the bishop’s concerns, the governor’s office denied that there were weekly attacks and claimed that authorities had been taking necessary precautions.³⁸

Meanwhile, Turkey’s culture of impunity continues to make Christians an attractive target for hate crimes. A month-and-a-half after the coup attempt, Turkey granted an early release to Father Santoro’s murderer.³⁹ The killer, who refused to express remorse for his crime in court⁴⁰ and even made a short-lived escape⁴¹ from prison in 2012, managed to walk free after serving only ten years of his 18-year sentence.⁴² He also bragged in a 2011 letter to a relative that he was treated like a king in prison, and even vowed to kill the Pope.⁴³ He added that he wanted to become even more famous than Mehmet Ali Ağca, the Turkish assailant who shot and critically wounded Pope John Paul II in 1981 only to walk free from a Turkish prison in 2010.⁴⁴ In a 2017 interview with the Turkish media, Santoro’s killer stated, “I only feel regret for putting my state in a difficult situation.”⁴⁵

The Role of Turkish Government and State-Run Media

Besides failing to tackle Turkey’s culture of impunity, the Turkish government is also responsible for its ongoing crackdown on religious minorities. On October 8, 2016, authorities banned the Protestant church in Antioch – an ancient cradle of Christianity – for conducting Bible study “without a permit.”⁴⁶ Soon after, two officials of Turkey’s Association of Protestant Churches reported that the police had questioned them

³⁶ “Explosivo contra la iglesia de Don Santoro. Obispo Bizzeti: en Trabzon intimidaciones constantes (Explosives against the church of Father Santoro. Bishop Bizzeti: In Trabzon intimidations are constant),” *Agenzia Fides* (Vatican), February 7, 2018. (http://www.fides.org/es/news/63708-ASIA_TURQUIA_Explosivo_contra_la_iglesia_de_Don_Santoro_Obispo_Bizzeti_en_Trabzon_intimidaciones_constantes)

³⁷ “Trabzon’daki Kiliseye Her Hafta Saldırı Oluyor (There is an Attack Against the Trabzon Church every week),” *Haber 61* (Turkey), February 7, 2018. (<https://www.haber61.net/trabzon/trabzon-daki-kiliseye-her-hafta-saldiri-oluyor-h315192.html>)

³⁸ “Valilikten Kiliseye Saldırı Açıklaması (The Statement of the Governor’s Office about the Church Attack),” *CNN Türk* (Turkey), February 8, 2018. (<https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/valilikten-kiliseye-saldiri-aciklamasi>)

³⁹ “Turkey gives early release to man convicted of murdering priest,” *Catholic Herald* (UK), August 31, 2016. (<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/08/31/turkey-gives-early-release-to-man-convicted-of-murdering-priest>)

⁴⁰ “‘Türkler de Hristiyan olacak’ deyince vurdum! (I shot him when he said ‘Turks, too, will become Christian’),” *Karadeniz* (Turkey), January 16, 2017. (<http://www.karadenizgazete.com.tr/gundem/turkler-de-hristiyan-olacak--deyince-vurdum-/147267>)

⁴¹ “Santoro’s murderer released,” *Agos* (Turkey), August 25, 2016. (<http://www.agos.com.tr/en/article/16336/santoro-s-murderer-released>)

⁴² Uzey Bulut, “Turkey Released Killer of Catholic Priest: What It Means,” *CBN News*, October 7, 2016. (<https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2016/october/turkey-releases-killer-of-catholic-priest>)

⁴³ “Papa’yı da indirip Ağca’dan daha ünlü olacağım (I will bring down the Pope and become more famous than Ağca),” *CNN Türk* (Turkey), May 26, 2011. (<https://www.cnnturk.com/2011/turkiye/05/26/papayi.da.indirip.agcadan.daha.unlu.olacagim/618010.0/index.html>)

⁴⁴ Şebnem Arsu, “Man Who Shot Pope in 1981 is Freed,” *The New York Times*, January 18, 2010. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/19/world/europe/19pope.html>)

⁴⁵ “‘Türkler de Hristiyan olacak’ deyince vurdum! (I shot him when he said ‘Turks, too, will become Christian’),” *Karadeniz* (Turkey), January 16, 2017. (<http://www.karadenizgazete.com.tr/gundem/turkler-de-hristiyan-olacak--deyince-vurdum-/147267>)

⁴⁶ “Protestan Kilisesi Mühürlendi (Protestant Church was Sealed),” *Sat 7 Türk Haber* (Turkey), October 8, 2016. (<http://haber.sat7turk.com/protestan-kilisesi-muhurlendi>)

about their pastoral work.⁴⁷ On October 17, 2016, airport officials denied entry to an American Protestant who headed the Ankara Refugee Ministry, insisting that that he was a “national security threat” – an accusation also made against U.S. Pastor Andrew Brunson, whom the government has imprisoned.⁴⁸ In November 2016, authorities handed control of the Syriac church in the city of Şanlıurfa to a nearby university’s faculty of Islamic theology.⁴⁹

It is also alarming to see that Turkey’s state-run media outlets are active in smearing and scapegoating religious minorities, using state funds for incitement, particularly against Jews and Christians. For example, *The Last Emperor* (*Payitaht Abdülhamid*), a historical drama funded and broadcasted by Turkey’s state-run Turkish Radio Television, TRT, is a blatantly anti-Semitic and anti-Christian drama.⁵⁰ The villains in *The Last Emperor* bear a keen resemblance to all of the Turkish government’s bogeymen, religious or otherwise. In the show, Jewish conspiracies often meld together with those of Britain and other European powers, the Catholic Church, socialists, Young Turks, and Freemasons. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan himself often refers to such a grand conspiracy, overseen by a nebulous puppet-master he calls “the Mastermind.” In turn, “Mastermind” was the name of a documentary aired on a leading pro-government news channel, which, among other insights, revealed that Jews have dominated the world for the past 3,500 years.⁵¹ Each episode of *The Last Emperor* has led to an upsurge in hate speech and incitement online. One Twitter user, after watching this state-funded drama, vowed to turn the territory between the Euphrates and Nile rivers into Jewish graveyards.⁵² Another Twitter user, after watching the drama, said, “The more I watch *The Last Emperor*, the more my enmity to Jews increases. You infidels, you filthy creatures.”⁵³

Turkey’s state-run media outlets demonstrated a similar attitude during the July 2017 attack against the Neve Shalom synagogue in Istanbul.⁵⁴ At the outset of the violent protest by an ultranationalist-cum-Islamist group that vowed to “prevent worship” at the synagogue,⁵⁵ the Foundation of the Chief Rabbinate

⁴⁷ Sibel Hürtaş, “What state of emergency means for Turkey’s Protestants,” *Al-Monitor*, October 19, 2016.

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20161021125614/http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/10/turkey-state-of-emergency-for-protestants.html>)

⁴⁸ Barbara G. Baker, “US academic and refugee aid worker ‘banned for life’ from Turkey,” *World Watch Monitor*, October 21, 2016. (<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/10/us-academic-and-refugee-aid-worker-banned-for-life-from-turkey>)

⁴⁹ “Urfa’da Süryanilere ait tek tarihi kilise kültür merkezine çevrildi (In Urfa, the only historical church belonging to Syrians was transformed into a cultural center),” *Gazete Karınca* (Turkey), November 14, 2016.

(<http://gazetekarınca.com/2016/11/urfada-suryanilere-ait-tek-tarihi-kilise-kultur-merkezine-cevrildi>)

⁵⁰ Aykan Erdemir and Oren Kessler, “A Turkish TV blockbuster reveals Erdogan’s conspiratorial, anti-Semitic worldview,” *The Washington Post*, May 15, 2018. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/05/15/a-turkish-tv-blockbuster-reveals-erdogans-conspiratorial-anti-semitic-worldview>)

⁵¹ Ariel Ben Solomon, “Turkish ‘Documentary’ Says Jews Have Been ‘Mastermind’ For 3,500 Years,” *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), April 16, 2015. (<http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Turkish-documentary-says-Jews-have-been-mastermind-for-3500-years-398299>)

⁵² @KarayelFettah, “#HainlerinSonu Senn yarım bıraktığın o işi evelALLAH torunların gerçekleştirecek ve Fırat/Nil arasını Yahudi mezarlığı yapacak ecdadım Osmanlı (#TheEndofTraitors My ancestors the Ottomans, that task that you left unfinished will verily be realized by your grandchildren and turn the territory between Euphrates and Nile into a Jewish graveyard),” *Twitter*, March 17, 2017.

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20170510194952/https://twitter.com/KarayelFettah/status/842825131760193537>)

⁵³ Serdar Korucu, “Antisemit Mesajlar Payitaht’ın 4. Bölümü Üzerinden Sürdü (Anti-Semitic messages continued through the fourth episode of *The Last Emperor*),” *Avlaremöz* (Turkey), March 23, 2017.

(<http://www.avlaremöz.com/2017/03/23/antisemit-mesajlar-payitahtin-4-bolumu-uzerinden-surdu-serdar-korucu>)

⁵⁴ Aykan Erdemir, “Istanbul’s Iconic Synagogue Besieged by Islamist Nationalists,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, July 21, 2017. (<http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/dr-aykan-erdemir-istanbul-icomic-synagogue-besieged-by-islamist-nationalists>)

⁵⁵ “Turkish Islamists hold anti-Israel rally at Istanbul synagogue, kick doors,” *The Times of Israel* (Turkey), July 21, 2017. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/turkish-islamists-hold-anti-israel-rally-outside-istanbul-synagogue>)

of Turkey, which represents the country's dwindling Jewish community, urged the authorities to take action.⁵⁶ Government agencies, regrettably, added fuel to the fire. Turkey's official Anadolu news agency and its state-run television network, TRT, used photos of the Istanbul synagogue attack to promote the next day's anti-Israel protests.⁵⁷ Turkey's Jewish community reacted by stating that the government media's coverage amounted to "making Turkish Jews" a target.⁵⁸ Both outlets later deleted the incendiary tweets and removed the photo from their reports. A Turkish columnist warned the next day that the ongoing incitement resembles the provocations that led to the Istanbul pogrom of 1955, where government-orchestrated attacks destroyed 73 churches and a synagogue.⁵⁹

The synagogue attack also led to an outburst of anti-Semitic hate speech and incitement online. A self-identified "Enemy of the Jews" account echoed Nazi propaganda in referring to Jews as "Untermenschen" and "dogs,"⁶⁰ and vowed that Istanbul's Jews will "suffer the pain" while also adding, "You think you are untouchable. We will touch you."⁶¹

The hate speech in official news outlets is often matched with statements from members of Turkey's ruling party. Burhan Kuzu, an AKP lawmaker who was hoping to become the next speaker of the Turkish Parliament, insinuated in November 2017 that U.S. President John F. Kennedy was killed by Jews for transferring the right to print U.S. dollar bills from a Jewish bank to the U.S. Federal Reserve.⁶² Owing to Turkey's culture of impunity, there are little or no consequences to hate speech or incitement, and culprits of hate speech rarely experience any reprimand.

Pastor Andrew Brunson

One case that best illustrates the smearing and scapegoating of religious minorities in Turkey is that of U.S. Pastor Andrew Brunson. On April 16 this year, Pastor Brunson, a Presbyterian minister from North Carolina unjustly detained in a Turkish prison for 18 months,⁶³ finally got to defend himself in court. His trial ended

⁵⁶ @tyahuditoplumu, "Bu akşam Neve Şalom sinagogumuz önünde yapılan provokatif gösteriyi kınıyor, ilgili makamlardan gereğinin yapılmasını bekliyoruz (We condemn the provocative protest in front of our Neve Shalom Synagogue, and expect the relevant authorities to do what is necessary)," *Twitter*, July 20, 2017.

(<https://twitter.com/tyahuditoplumu/status/888114641049497600>)

⁵⁷ "Sinagoga saldırıya AA ve TRT'den teşvik gibi yayın – Sildiler (AA and TRT's encouraging broadcast for the attack on the synagogue – which they deleted)," *Avlaremoz* (Turkey), July 21, 2017.

(<http://www.avlaremoz.com/2017/07/21/sinagoga-saldiriya-aa-ve-trtden-tesvik-gibi-yayin-sildiler>)

⁵⁸ @tyahuditoplumu, "Habere dün Neve Şalom sinagogumuza tehdit & provokasyon için gelenlerin fotoğrafını koyan AA Türk Yahudilerini hedef göstermektedir. Yeter !

<https://twitter.com/anadoluajansi/status/888292477563674624> (AA, which has put the photographs of those who came to our Neve Shalom Synagogue for threats and provocations, is making Turkish Jews a target. Enough!),

Twitter, July 21, 2017. (<https://twitter.com/tyahuditoplumu/status/888296349959163904>)

⁵⁹ Murat Yetkin, "Sıcak Analiz: Yeni 6-7 Eylül kıskırtmasına dikkat (Hot Analysis: Watch out for September 6-7 provocation)," *Hürriyet* (Turkey), July 21, 2017. (<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/murat-yetkin/sicak-analiz-yeni-6-7-eylul-kiskirtmasina-dikkat-40526824>)

⁶⁰ @aykan_erdemir, "Today's leading inciter troll calls Jews 'dogs' & 'Untermensch,' and vows that all of #Istanbul's Jews must suffer," *Twitter*, July 20, 2017.

(https://twitter.com/aykan_erdemir/status/888166686179852289)

⁶¹ @aykan_erdemir, "Far right troll, who self-identifies as anti-Semite, threatens Turkey's Jewish community: 'You think you're untouchable. We will touch you,'" *Twitter*, July 20, 2017.

(https://twitter.com/aykan_erdemir/status/888161618575622144)

⁶² Serdar Korucu, "Burhan Kuzu'dan Tartışma Yaratan 'Yahudi Bankası' Paylaşımı (Burhan Kuzu's Controversial Tweet about the 'Jewish Bank')," *Avlaremoz* (Turkey), November 13, 2017.

(<http://www.avlaremoz.com/2017/11/13/burhan-kuzudan-tartisma-yaratan-yahudi-bankasi-paylasimi-serdar-korucu>)

⁶³ "Brunson Update," *World Watch Monitor*, accessed April 25, 2018. (<http://worldwitness.org/brunson-update>)

in a continuation until May 7, and he was sent back to prison to face up to seven years of pretrial detention under Turkey's draconian state of emergency.⁶⁴

For over 20 years before his sudden arrest, Pastor Brunson had preached peacefully in Turkey's third-largest city, Izmir. Following the attempted coup in July 2016, Turkish authorities initially charged Pastor Brunson with membership in an armed terrorist organization.⁶⁵ Later, they added charges of espionage and attempting to overthrow the government, although there is no evidence to support any of these accusations.⁶⁶ Pastor Brunson's attorneys finally received the indictment last month, but only after it had been leaked to the media.⁶⁷ The 62-page indictment is a muddled collection of conspiracy theories based largely on ludicrous accusations from three "secret witnesses." If convicted, Pastor Brunson could face a life sentence.⁶⁸

Pastor Brunson is a respected member of his community and did not quit his post even after surviving a far-right militant's armed attack in 2011.⁶⁹ When Turkey's religious minorities, particularly Christians and Jews, became scapegoats following the abortive coup in July 2016, Brunson, like many other church leaders, came under increasing pressure.

Turkey's pro-government media has been shameless in its smear campaign against Pastor Brunson. The media claimed that the pastor would have become the next director of the CIA had he been successful in helping to coordinate the attempted coup against Erdoğan.⁷⁰ When there was a bomb attack against wardens of the maximum-security prison where Pastor Brunson was being held, a story accusing the CIA of masterminding the attack ran under the headline "The Pastor's Bomb."⁷¹

The targeting of Pastor Brunson, however, is not simply the result of the post-coup-attempt rise in Turkish chauvinism. Ankara, borrowing Iran's tactic of holding Western nationals captive, has launched a campaign of hostage diplomacy.⁷² Since the abortive coup, Turkish authorities have arrested on dubious charges not only U.S. citizens and consular staff, but also British, Czech, Dutch, French, German, Greek, and Swedish

⁶⁴ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Press Release, "Turkey Misses Opportunity to Release Pastor Andrew Brunson, Sets Next Hearing to May 7," April 16, 2018. (<http://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/press-releases-statements/turkey-misses-opportunity-release-pastor-andrew-brunson-sets>)

⁶⁵ Michele Kelemen, "Amid U.S. Calls For Release, American Pastor Remains Behind Bars In Turkey," *NPR*, April 13, 2017. (<https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/04/13/523774885/amid-u-s-calls-for-release-a-u-s-pastor-remains-behind-bars-in-turkey>)

⁶⁶ Onize Ohikere, "Jailed American pastor faces additional charges in Turkey," *World*, August 25, 2017. (https://world.wng.org/content/jailed_american_pastor_faces_additional_charges_in_turkey)

⁶⁷ Sibel Hürtaş, "Turkey doubles down in pastor row with US," *Al-Monitor*, March 16, 2018. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/03/turkey-united-states-ankara-doubles-down-in-priest-row.html>)

⁶⁸ Laura Pitel, "Turkish prosecutor demands life sentence for jailed US pastor," *Financial Times* (UK), March 13, 2018. (<https://www.ft.com/content/042f7ab2-26cb-11e8-b27e-cc62a39d57a0>)

⁶⁹ İsmail Saymaz, "En tuhaf El Kaide davası bugün başlıyor (The strangest Al Qaeda trial to start today)," *Radikal* (Turkey), November 21, 2011. (<http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/en-tuhaf-el-kaide-davasi-bugun-basliyor-1070145>)

⁷⁰ Mevlüt Yüksel, "15 Temmuz başarılı olsaydı CIA'nın başına geçecekti (Had July 15 succeeded, he would have become the director of the CIA)," *Takvim* (Turkey), May 20, 2015. (<https://www.takvim.com.tr/guncel/2017/05/20/15-temmuz-basarili-olsaydi-cianin-basina-gececekti>)

⁷¹ "Pastör Bombası," *Takvim*, September 1, 2017. (<https://www.takvim.com.tr/guncel/2017/09/01/pastor-bombasi>)

⁷² Eric S. Edelman and Aykan Erdemir, "Turkey's president is holding Americans hostage. Why aren't we doing anything about it?" *The Washington Post*, April 15, 2018. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2018/04/15/turkeys-president-is-holding-americans-hostage-why-arent-we-doing-anything-about-it>)

nationals, including journalists, academics, human rights activists, and a Christian pilgrim on his way to Jerusalem.⁷³

Last September, shortly after issuing an emergency decree giving himself the authority to trade foreign nationals held in Turkish prisons for individuals incarcerated abroad,⁷⁴ the Turkish president publicly offered to release the pastor, proposing a prisoner exchange with the United States that would involve the extradition of Fethullah Gülen.⁷⁵

This offer, however, is a red herring. Gülen was one of Erdoğan's closest allies for more than a decade after the Turkish president's rise to power in 2002.⁷⁶ If the U.S. extradited Gülen, and if he then appeared before a court of law in Turkey, his testimony could reveal embarrassing details of their partnership,⁷⁷ thereby hurting Erdoğan's reelection prospects in the June 24 snap elections.

When Erdoğan made this swap offer last September, he was actually aiming for an exchange that involved Reza Zarrab, the Turkish-Iranian gold trader who was scheduled to stand trial in New York in November for evading sanctions against Iran.⁷⁸ The Turkish president wanted to prevent Zarrab from revealing information to U.S. authorities⁷⁹ that might implicate Erdoğan⁸⁰ in pervasive corruption. Zarrab's attorneys confirmed swap rumors by stating to the judge that they had been looking for a "diplomatic solution,"⁸¹ a euphemism for a trade that would release a sanctions-busting suspect in exchange for an innocent hostage.⁸² Pastor Brunson's case illustrates clearly how religious minorities have become scapegoats exploited to cover up embarrassing developments at home and abroad, as well as pawns to be used as leverage in bilateral relations.

⁷³ "Turkey rift: German politicians demand economic pressure," *Deutsche Welle* (Germany), August 28, 2017. (<http://www.dw.com/en/turkey-rift-german-politicians-demand-economic-pressure/a-40262485>)

⁷⁴ Wendy Zeldin, "Turkey: More Emergency Decrees Issued," *Library of Congress Global Legal Monitor*, September 8, 2017. (<http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/turkey-more-emergency-decrees-issued>)

⁷⁵ "Turkey's Erdogan links fate of detained U.S. pastor to wanted cleric Gulen," *Reuters*, September 28, 2017. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-turkey-cleric/turkeys-erdogan-links-fate-of-detained-u-s-pastor-to-wanted-cleric-gulen-idUSKCN1C31IK>)

⁷⁶ Daniel Dombey, James Fontanella-Khan, and Adam Samson, "Fethullah Gulen: one-time ally who became Erdogan enemy," *Financial Times* (UK), July 16, 2016. (<https://www.ft.com/content/e87a34e4-4ae7-11e6-8d68-72e9211e86ab>)

⁷⁷ Gareth Jenkins, "The Balyoz Retrial and the Changing Politics of Turkish Justice," *The Turkey Analyst*, July 25, 2014. (<https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/331-the-balyoz-retrial-and-the-changing-politics-of-turkish-justice.html>)

⁷⁸ Benjamin Weiser and Carlotta Gall, "Banker From Turkey Is Convicted in U.S. Over Plot to Evade Iran Sanctions," *The New York Times*, January 3, 2018. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/03/world/europe/turkey-iran-sanctions-trial.html>)

⁷⁹ Devlin Barrett, "A gold dealer's trial in New York deepens mistrust between the U.S. and Turkey," *The Washington Post*, November 26, 2017. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/a-gold-dealers-trial-in-new-york-deepens-mistrust-between-the-us-and-turkey/2017/11/26/978753bc-cfb3-11e7-9d3a-bcbe2af58c3a_story.html)

⁸⁰ Devlin Barrett and Erin Cunningham, "Gold trader implicates Turkey's president in corruption scheme," *The Washington Post*, November 30, 2017. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/gold-dealer-implicates-turkeys-president-in-corruption-scheme/2017/11/30/fd4e8a50-d614-11e7-95bf-df7c19270879_story.html)

⁸¹ Dexter Filkins, "A Mysterious Case Involving Turkey, Iran, and Rudy Giuliani," *The New Yorker*, April 14, 2017. (<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-mysterious-case-involving-turkey-iran-and-rudy-giuliani>)

⁸² Merve Tahiroğlu and Eric S. Edelman, "Why Trump should not trade prisoners with Erdogan," *The Washington Post*, July 7, 2017. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/07/07/why-trump-should-not-swap-prisoners-with-erdogan>)

Policy Recommendations:

- The Travel Advice and Advisories of the Government of Canada state that “although religious proselytizing is not illegal, some activities may be considered illegal and could lead to detention” in Turkey. Travel warnings could spell out more clearly the alarming rise in the targeting of foreign nationals, religious minorities, and members of the clergy that could result in long pretrial detention without due process and attorney-client privilege.
- Canadian lawmakers could organize fact-finding missions to Turkey to investigate and report the state of freedom of religion or belief in Turkey, as well as engage Turkish lawmakers to encourage strengthening minority rights and freedom of religion or belief in Turkey.
- Canadian officials should urge their Turkish counterparts in bilateral and multilateral platforms to lift the state of emergency as an enabler of grave human rights violations.
- Canada can increase and earmark a greater portion of its international development aid to Turkey for supporting civil society organizations and projects that aim to strengthen minority rights and freedom of religion or belief.
- Canada can develop programs to host and/or offer refuge to Turkish minorities who are persecuted as well as fund “scholars at risk” and “journalists at risk” programs for religious freedom advocates who have been targeted by the Turkish government for their human rights and religious freedom advocacy.
- The Canadian public sector can institutionalize twinning programs with their Turkish counterparts to facilitate peer-to-peer best practice sharing in the field of equal citizenship, social inclusion, anti-discrimination, and anti-hate crime policies.
- The Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Sergei Magnitsky Law) provides for implementing restrictive measures against foreign nationals responsible for gross violations of internationally recognized human rights, including “freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief.” Canada could consider using the legislation to impose asset freezes and travel bans on Turkish officials and their accomplices for unjust detention of, and incitement against, religious minorities.