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**TACKLING HONOUR IN THE AFTERMATH WITH A  
GOOD PRACTICE**

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*\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.*

### **Tackling Honour in the Aftermath with a Good Practice**

Crimes of honour are violations of women's and girl's human rights. These crimes are subjected on individuals, overwhelmingly women and girls, who believe or are perceived to believe in values and standards which are at odds with the social mores of the society in which they may live<sup>1</sup>. Defining these crimes and risk factors are not an exact science but a matter of judgment. The crucial point here, however, is to note about notions of what is acceptable and unacceptable in terms of behaviour, and what constitutes harm. These notions are culturally, politically, socially, economically, and geographically influenced and constantly under review as values and social norms evolve. Since honour is a culture and language specific and historically contingent issue, it changes in time and space. Nonetheless, what remains constant is controlling and regulating women's sexualities, lives, choices, and autonomies within the hegemonic masculine order we all live in. Disappointingly, serious and severe lack of clarity on the concept of honour and risk factors leading to these crimes continues to be a major problem among different communities all throughout the world as well as people in Turkey<sup>2</sup>. This is probably the most important angle of our work. Until we all understand and know about what we are really dealing with, we will continue to make gravely mistakes. More lives will be lost, and the situation will become more severe.

The evolvement of this highly complex issue within the last 15 years in Turkey is breathtaking. This horrendous violation of women's and girls' human rights went from zero discussion in the public eye to Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with the United Kingdom in 2004, main sponsoring a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly<sup>3</sup>, and a having Prime Ministerial Declaration<sup>4</sup> of its own. Although the development is quite remarkable when it comes to the actual implementation on the ground and changing people's minds about women's sexualities and human rights, the road seems more strenuous than before. Despite the existence of a very strong women's movement in the country, it is filled with serious backlashes to women's struggles, ethnic/racial misperceptions, and some serious deficiencies on women's sexuality in the new Penal Code. This paper aims to look into the current changes in the law regarding women's human rights, and analyze the current discrepancies and backlashes from an interdisciplinary perspective, specifically focusing on crimes of honour, and lastly to discuss a good practice, namely working with religious leaders, as part of eradicating violations of women's human rights in Turkey.

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<sup>1</sup> House of Lords, Islam vs. Secretary of State for the Home Department, Regina v. Immigration Appeal Tribunal and Another ex parte Shah (Conjoined Appeals), 25 March 1999.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, there is still lack of clarity on what constitutes harm and what leads to crimes of honour in the indigenous Dutch communities in the Netherlands. This lack of clarity represents a significant problem especially for 400,000 Turkey originating migrants living in the country.

<sup>3</sup> Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, [*on the report of the Third Committee (A/57/549)*], 57/179.  
Working towards the elimination of crimes against women committed in the name of honour.

<sup>4</sup> Prime Ministerial Declaration issued on 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2006 titled "Çocuk ve Kadınlara Yönelik Şiddet Hareketleriyle Töre ve Namus Cinayetlerinin Önlenmesi için Alınacak Tedbirler."

## The old laws

The old laws enacted during the establishment of the Republic in 20s, reflected the views of founding fathers on women. Ayşe Parla, in her award winning article, argued that virginity examinations must be viewed as particularly modern form of institutionalized violence used to secure the sign of the modern but chaste woman, fashioned by the modernization project of Turkish nationalist elite. Parla further states that interrelation of legal and cultural in the enforcement of gendered social norms shows us how the state's regular intrusion into women's bodies comprises a fundamental facet of its sovereign claim over social relations in the name of nation<sup>5</sup>. Parla sees all of this as 'emblematic of the incorporation of the preoccupation with women's modesty, previously enforced primarily through kinship networks, into the mechanisms of surveillance deployed by the modern state'. I, like Parla, argue that crimes of honour and how it is dealt within the justice system further strengthens this argument. Even with the bold changes in the Penal Code, the deficiencies and inadequacies dealing with crimes of honour in the legislation and at the Court persists strongly<sup>6</sup>.

Since the late nineties, Turkey has been witnessing major legal reforms of these laws enacted by the founding fathers. Thus the reforms made possible by the strong lobby in the country, women's movement, in the last decades are nothing short of transformation of the nation state. Because of these long standing reasons and rapid political transformation in the country, the backlash and serious resistance is expected. Before discussing these backlashes and resistances, I would like to look into these major legal reforms in the legislations.

On January 14, 1998, after decades of activism and lobbying by the women's groups in Turkey, the Parliament adopted the Law on the Protection of the Family, No: 4320, on prevention of the domestic violence. According to this new legislation, any member of a family subject to domestic violence can file a court case for 'protection order' against the perpetrator. This law was later on amended to include 'separated couples living in different households' as well as the extended family members of the couple, such as father-in-laws and sister-in-laws<sup>7</sup>. The major deficiency in this legislation, as it has been pointed out frequently by the feminist activists and feminist jurists, is the fact that it fails to include single and divorced women who are/were in relationships. Lately, the lack of adequate guidelines to use this legislation and unwillingness on behalf of the judicial system to exercise their power to use this law has been identified as serious problems<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> The 'honour' of the State: Virginity Examinations in Turkey, Ayşe Parla, *Feminist Studies*, Spring 2001, 27, 1, p. 65-88.

<sup>6</sup> Feminist lawyers Müzeyyen Nergiz and Meral Danış Beştaş, both practicing in Diyarbakır, led me to believe that the new Code did not bring any positive changes in dealing with crimes of honour at the Court. Telephone interviews conducted on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Amended on April 26<sup>th</sup> 2007, No: 5636/2.

<sup>8</sup> For extensive discussion on domestic violence in Turkey, please see Ayşe Gül Altınay and Yeşim Arat, *Türkiye'de Kadına Yönelik Şiddet*, İstanbul: 2007; The General Directorate of Women's Status, *Türkiye'de Kadına Yönelik Aile İçi Şiddet Araştırması* 2008, <http://www.ksgm.gov.tr/tdvaw/anasayfa> (Accessed on May 7<sup>th</sup> 2009); Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against women, and its causes and consequences, Yakın Ertürk Mission to Turkey, 2007, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G07/100/90/PDF/G0710090.pdf?OpenElement>, (Accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2009)

On 22<sup>nd</sup> of November, 2001, the Turkish Grand National Assembly, by adopting a new Civil Code, established full equality of men and women in the family, such as by eliminating the usage of ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ from its terminology and introducing the term ‘spouses’ in its new language<sup>9</sup>. The new Code, prepared in the midst of serious resistance from religious and nationalist conservatives in the country, is another groundbreaking achievement of the women’s movement. For the campaigning of the new Code, more than 120 women’s nongovernmental organizations came together, an unprecedented event at that time<sup>10</sup>. The new Code introduced the equal rights over the family household, equal rights over property acquired during marriage, equal representative powers, and abolished the concept of illegitimate children<sup>11</sup>.

In Turkey, marriage is a registered official event/ceremony. The importance of marriage and what it means in the establishment of the Republic, and the continuance of nation-state is some of the major topics among feminist political scientists. For instance, the Article 174 of the Turkish Constitution cites the principal of civil marriage as one of the Fundamental Reform Laws in establishing the Republic in 1923, and makes direct referencing to the Article 110 of the old Civil Code. In the new Civil Code, conditions for marriage in its framework are clearly and explicitly defined. Article 124 states that men and women are not allowed to marry before the age of 18, correcting the previous discriminatory provision where different minimum ages existed for men and women. In the old Civil Code, the marriage age was 17 for men, and 15 for women<sup>12</sup>. The full and free consent, both for minors and adults, of the couple getting married is a basic condition for marriage. In cases of forced marriages, women can apply to the Court of Law for annulment of their marriage within the first five years. Two basic criteria for marriage, age and ability to discern, are clearly spelled out in the new Civil Code. The minimum age limit can be lowered to 16 under extraordinary circumstances at the Court of Law by the Judge. All of these reforms in the earlier part of the decade brought Turkey one step closer to the realization of women’s human rights, however, the actual implementation of these reforms are no where near to the desired levels of attainment<sup>13</sup>.

The reform of the Penal Code came in the midst of sea of changes in the country<sup>14</sup>. After the 2002 landslide elections of the AKP (identified as conservative centre right by the Prime Minister Erdoğan) government, there were unprecedented reforms in the country to join

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<sup>9</sup>It became effective on the 1st of January 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Please see expert paper prepared by Pınar İkkaracan and Liz Erçevik Amado titled Good Practices in legislation on Violence against women in Turkey and Problems of Implementation, United Nations EGM/GPLVAW/2008/EP.13, 23 May 2008

<sup>11</sup> In the Civil Code, women are entitled an equal share of assets accumulated throughout the marriage, and this clause is valid for the property acquired after January 1<sup>st</sup> of 2002. The relevant information can be found in Article 10 of Law No: 4722, Governing the Enforcement and the Implementation of Civil Code.

<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the Article 41 of Turkish Constitution was amended to redefine the family as “based on equality between the spouses” (Amended on 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 2001, No: 4709: 17).

<sup>13</sup> For instance, as I was writing this article, an execution of 45 people in rural Mardin, a Southeastern city occurred. Although the real reasons and healthy factual information are yet to unravel in such mass killings, there are apparent violations of women’s human rights in the entire story. Unfortunately, no one in the mainstream media is even addressing women’s right to choose her partner for marriage or/even using gender sensitive language. Please see Radikal Daily Newspaper on May 7<sup>th</sup> 2009.

<sup>14</sup> It was adopted on 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2004, and became effective on the 1st of June 2005. The Law Number 5237, and published in the Official Gazette on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004 No: 25611.

the European Union<sup>15</sup>. The Penal Code Draft Law Sub-Justice Commission (herein after the Penal Code Commission) of the Parliament began to review the draft law and at the same time Women's Working Group on the Penal Code launched the Campaign for the Reform of the Turkish Penal Code from a Gender Perspective<sup>16</sup>. The Penal Code Commission at the Parliament, all male group, was uninterested in communicating with women's groups and learning about gender based perspective. However, organized and strategic lobbying lasting for almost three years, led to the new Penal Code with significant changes in gender equality and women's human rights.

The Old Code was introduced in 1926 at the time of establishing Republic, was adapted from Italian Penal Code<sup>17</sup>. In the new Penal Code, crimes of sexual assault are explicitly named and clearly defined under the section "Crimes against Sexual Inviolability". All of these crimes are previously regulated as "Felonies against Public Decency and Family Order" under the Crimes against Society. This is probably the most important change in the law since this language acknowledges women's right to their sexuality. This significant change in defining and criminalizing sexual crimes is reflected on thirty-five progressive changes in definitions and higher sentences for these crimes. This paper, due to its scope and main goal, will focus on the changes and debates surrounding the crimes of honour in both Penal Codes.

In the old Penal Code, the crimes of honour were not explicitly cited under the Section of Crimes of Murdering Man. The murder depending on whether it was meditated or non-meditated was dealt under the Articles 448 throughout 455. Article 449 (1), regarding the act of man slaughter, stated '(1)If committed against wife, husband, sibling, foster father, foster mother, foster child, step mother, step father, step child, father-in-law, mother-in-law, bridegroom and brides', the defendants would get higher sentences.<sup>18</sup> Although the law explicitly protected the close relatives, interestingly enough, even the simple mentioning of the word 'honour' at the Court by the perpetrator, resulted in much lighter sentences for the crime committed. To illustrate this further, in all of the 200 cases I collected for my research, it was very troubling to see that women's sexuality, her behaviour, and alleged/real gossip regarding her 'affairs' were the main issues during the trial<sup>19</sup>. In the Reasoning Sections of the Judgments, the Judges elaborated on these issues widely in detail.

Moreover, another clause in the old Penal Code troubled women's rights groups and some jurists greatly. The Article 462, under a different section, dealt with the murder at the time of committing adultery. It read as follows:

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<sup>15</sup> For very recent political update, please refer to Ann Dismorr Turkey Decoded, Beirut: Saqi, 2008; Chris Morris, The New Turkey: The Quiet Revolution on the Edge of Europe, London: Granta, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 10.

<sup>17</sup> The Code was adopted from Italian Code, Zanardelli Law of 1889, was usually dubbed by the human rights lawyers as 'masterpiece of Mussolini'. For detailed analysis of the old Penal Code please refer to Gökçen Artuk, Yenidünya, *Ceza Hukuku: Genel Hükümler*, Ankara: Seçkin, 2002. For detailed analysis of establishing Turkish Republic, please refer to Sinan Akşin, Turkey: From Empire to Revolutionary Republic the Emergence of the Turkish Nation from 1789 to Present, London: Hurst, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Latest amendment on 7.1.1981-2370/ 15; previous amendments were also taken place.

<sup>19</sup> The author's Doctoral Dissertation at the Marmara University, titled Honour Killings Within The Context Of International Human Rights Law: Conceptual And Legal Analysis, And Evaluation Of Legal Cases In Turkey, June 2005.

*Article 462- If the acts mentioned in the two sections above are committed, against a husband or a wife or a sister or one of the children or the common perpetrator or both who were eye witnessed on the act of adultery or at the moment he/she was having illegitimate sexual intercourse or if it appears without doubt that he/she committed adultery or had illegitimate sex, by a wife or a husband or one of the parents or a brother or a sister, the determined punishment for the act is reduced by one eighth and transformed into heavy imprisonment<sup>20</sup>.*

This article was widely accused of discriminating and violating women's human rights was later abolished. The initiation to abolish the Article 462 made by Judge Ali Güzel of Second Criminal Court of Bakırköy District, Istanbul stated the following summary in the statement of reasons:

*“The right to life, and to preserve and develop one's material and mental existence are basic rights which are not touchable, resolvable, or renouncable. This article arising from the claim of an individual to possession and domination over another individual who is leading her life based on her own free will and own choices, especially if she has reached the age of discretion and can distinguish between right and wrong, his egoism of not allowing her to love someone else, and the idea of cleansing the honour, have nothing in conformity with the general principles of law”.*

As you can see from the Judge Güzel's statement to the Constitution Court in his appeal to abolish this law, it explicitly referred to women although the Article 462 does not make such distinction. In implementation, this Article was rarely used against men when he committed adultery<sup>21</sup>. Furthermore, what I found in my research regarding this specific article was quite interesting. Due to its difficulty to sustain all of the relevant conditions cited in this law, it was extremely difficult to justify the cases at the Court<sup>22</sup>. For instance, according to the Judicial Statistics of 1995, out of 22.323 crimes of homicide, only one was considered within the scope of this specific article in the old Code<sup>23</sup>. Thus, the Court applied the Article 51, common mitigating clause that can be found in every Code around the world when it issued lenient sentences to the perpetrators. What happened during the trials was that mentality of the judiciary played a great role in “assessing women's honour” and making the victim's behaviour as the ‘great cause of concern for family<sup>24</sup>.’

<sup>20</sup> This article was amended in the above mentioned form on June 11<sup>th</sup> 1936 by the Law (No: 3038/1) and on June 29<sup>th</sup> 1938 by the Law (No: 3531/1) and on July 9<sup>th</sup> 1953 by the Law No: 6123/1). Later it was abolished on July 15<sup>th</sup> 2003 (No: 4928/19).

<sup>21</sup> Second Criminal Court of Bakırköy, İstanbul, Case File No: 1995/524.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed analysis of this in the Ottoman Empire Please see Fatmagül Berktaş “Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Feminizm”, Cumhuriyet'e Devreden Düşünce Mirası. Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet'in Birikimi, Cilt I, İletişim Yayınları, 1.Baskı, İstanbul, 2001. In her article, she states that despite Article 54 of the Kanun-ı Ceza, became effective after the Reform, stipulated that there was no distinction between women and men, Article 188 of the same law contradicted this. According to Article 188, if a man sees his wife or close relative on the act of sexual intercourse and kills them both, he is excused. According to the supplement of Article 201, if a woman committing adultery escapes being murdered, and is tried, she receives a statement of not less than 3 months and not more than 2 years of imprisonment. If the man is tried under the same circumstances, he is fined 5 to 100 *mecidiyes*.

<sup>23</sup> Adalet İstatistikleri 1995, T.C.Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, Ankara 1995.

<sup>24</sup> On the 1st of April 2009, the Minister Responsible with Women's Status, Nimet Çubukçu signed a protocol for training of the Judges on the fight against domestic violence. <http://www.ksgm.gov.tr/Duyurular> (Accessed on May 7th 2009)

Another horrendous issue, infanticide, is also closely related to crimes of honour in Turkey's context. Execution of the infants, who are allegedly "products of this dishonourable female behaviour" at the hands of parents and relatives, has a long history in Turkey. The Article 453 on infanticide read as:

*"If the criminal act of deliberate murder is committed, with the motive of saving the honour of the perpetrator or his wife or his mother or his daughter or his granddaughter or his foster daughter or his sister, against an illegitimate child before it is registered in the Public Registration Office and within the five days following its birth, the perpetrator receives a sentence of five years to ten years imprisonment."*

The law was amended several times. The term 'illegitimate child' was replaced by 'newborn baby', which meant while giving birth or as soon as the baby was born. The final version of article in the old Code took into consideration psychological disorder experienced by women pre or post-partum, and read as follows: "Article 453 *If the act of murder is committed by the mother against the new-born child with the motive of saving her honour, the perpetrator is sentenced to 4 to 8 years imprisonment*". In the New Penal Code, the relevant language relating to the murder of the infants buried in the 82 (e) clauses dealing with the murder. Law in its current form does not address the crimes resulting from post-partum psychosis and/or neurosis. The lack of public awareness and debate on the issue is disconcerting.

### **The new and the backlash**

After a long strenuous campaign by women's groups, the new Penal Code was adopted. The new Penal Code challenges the gendered social norms and State's sovereign claim over the bodies and sexualities of women, which were created by the founding fathers. The new Penal Code, however, does not address crimes of honour explicitly<sup>25</sup>. The Code mentions crimes of customs in Article 82 (j) "homicides by motivation of custom." By labelling crimes of honour as crimes of customs, two goals are intended: firstly, avoiding the explicit usage of term honour, *namus*, gender inequalities and existing oppressive practices towards sexualities of women and girls are strengthened and reinforced. Secondly, by using the term customs *töre*, it is explicitly stated that these killings only happen in certain communities, namely the Kurdish, in the country. The first one disregard the rights of women, has gender based implications, and the second one has racial based implications. Needless to say, both of these go against realizations of human rights.

*Custom (töre)* versus honour (*namus*) debate took another worrying turn. Until recently, the State always acknowledged the existence of the crimes of honour in Turkey, and initiated a very effective leadership at the United Nations by main sponsoring a resolution on

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<sup>25</sup> The other deficiencies in the new Penal Code can be named as follows: The penalization of discrimination based on sexual orientation, the criminalization of virginity testing under all circumstances, criminalization of consensual sexual relations of young aged 15-18 upon complaint, criminalization of publication of obscene material legitimizing discrimination based on sexual orientation, and the extension of the legal abortion period from 10 to 12 weeks are remaining to be amended according to the demands of feminist jurists and women's rights groups.

the issue. However, just recently, Bülent Şenay, representative on religious affairs in The Hague, the Netherlands for Turkish Embassy, said the following in an interview:

*“Turkish society does not have problems like domestic violence and custom killings. There are some incidents in some regions and this cannot be seen as the problem and issue of one faith; trying to make it look like one shows a bad intent. It is humiliating to accuse and represent any society with such issues. These initiatives with bad intentions bring troubles at the high levels. While Turkish society are having some serious problems such as education, unemployment, underemployment, lack of equal opportunity, lack of opportunity to learn native language, mentioning one or two incidents in some regions is diversion of the agenda. The religion of Islam is against the custom killings. Sociologically, we do not have such problems. We are being labelled with a problem which in fact it does not belong to us, and we cannot devote time resolving our real and important problems<sup>26</sup>.”*

Şenay’s words are worrying for women’s human rights defenders at many different levels. First of all, it is seriously troubling to see denial of the existence of the issue, a major change in the State’s Policy. This is not in accord with the usual attitude of the State in international mechanisms as well as the legislative changes in the country, and the policies and practices of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, mentioned all throughout this article. More disturbingly, it is quite upsetting to see the portrayal of crimes of honour, as a certain cultural practice belonging to one community in the country. Even the research conducted by the members of the Parliament on ‘Custom and Honour Killings’ stated the existence of crimes of honour in Black Sea Region as well in the Central Anatolian Region where different ethnic groups reside<sup>27</sup>. Yet at the same time, Şenay’s words on the hardship and discrimination Turkey originating migrants face in the Netherlands is also serious concerning fact. Resulting from ineffective policies and discriminatory attitudes, such sensitive issue is becoming extremely hard to deal with at all levels. One vital and essential warning, in the midst of Islamophobia and rising racism all over the world, must be issued here: how we address these sensitive issues is extremely important. Our endeavours must be guided with human dignity and respect for all. However, the way out is not to deny the problem but to present all sides of the existing situations in each place.

Moreover, there is yet another backlash in the legal system. Last fall, First Criminal Supreme Court green lighted execution of women in the name of honour<sup>28</sup>. The Court citing lack of family committee (*aile meclisi*) decision on the execution of women stated that the case was just ‘an honour killing’ and 82(j) only applied to the custom killings, where the family decision existed.

Implementing the new laws in due diligent manner, amending the criminal code on crimes of honour, and assessing the impact of the new legislations with an in-depth study are still waiting to be done. However, even with the current conflicting picture in the country, we

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.dogus.nl/index.php?pagina=soylesi&id=26>.

<sup>27</sup> Töre ve Namus Cinayetleri ile Kadınlara ve Çocuklara Yönelik Şiddetin Sebeplerinin Araştırılarak Alınması Gereken Önlemlerin Belirlenmesi Amacıyla Kurulan Meclis Araştırma Komisyonu (10/148, 182, 187, 284, 285)

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/kadin/109544-kadinlarin-katillerini-yargitay-koruyor> (Accessed on May 7th 2009)



must remember that these major legal reforms brought Turkey closer to the international standards and norms for gender equality and women's human rights.

### **A Good Practice: Doing it with Religious Leaders in Secular Turkey**

Such a complicated and sensitive issue, like crimes of honour and forced marriages, needs to be addressed in a comprehensive, holistic, and urgent manner. Tackling the role of religious leaders in preventing violence and promoting women's and girls' human rights is extremely crucial. Considering the fact that ninety percent of Turkish population is Muslim, and majority of the male population goes to mosques to receive religious services, such as listening to Friday sermons. In order to meet the demands, the Presidency of Religious Affairs, a state body, assigned almost 63,000 "imams", in addition to other religious officials including women. The religious leaders have a strong influence over the society, and capable of reaching to the large number of people from different social segments<sup>29</sup>. Thus, we concluded that if such an important and influential group is trained on "national and international human rights standards and instruments for the elimination of violence and discrimination against women", these notions would be transmitted directly to the public in general by imams.

To this end, we, Education Group at the Amnesty International Turkey, have been conducting Women's Human Rights Education Project titled *Raising Awareness and Increasing Capacity of Religious Leaders* for last three years at the Presidency of Religious Affairs. The Presidency established at the time of founding the Republic 85 years ago, provide necessary religious services to the Muslim population. In the context of Turkish secularism, the religious leaders working at the Presidency are first and foremost civil servants abiding by the rules of democracy, republic, and law in providing their services. The Presidency directly connected to the office of Prime Minister. Hence, using the international human rights documents signed by Turkey as their standard, such as CEDAW, is part of their duties and responsibilities. Moreover, attending our training is part of their on-the-job-training process where they get certain credits and certificates. In our trainings, we address preventing violence and discrimination, raising awareness of women's human rights, including abuses and improvements of cultural, social and economic rights as they relate to women, and strengthening the quality and inclusiveness of national dialogue on controversial topics that impact on fundamental rights and the process of democratization. We use participatory education techniques including group work, drama, role plays, case studies, brainstorming, art work, and discussion.

The most important factor in doing such a project is the political will of the leadership at the Presidency. The current president, Professor Ali Bardakoğlu, genuinely committed to eradication of gender discrimination and gender based violence<sup>30</sup>. During the last years, Presidency came along way in introducing women into their work. In 2004, they issued a press release stating that honour killings are against Koran and human dignity. Regularly, they

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, a participant in our training in Erzurum, a city in Eastern Turkey with serious economic challenges, indicated that he serves as many as 250,000 people in the region.

<sup>30</sup> The importance of leadership in eradicating violence against women is also mentioned in *Ending Violence Against Women: From Words to Action, Study of the Secretary-General, United Nations*, United Nations Publications, 2006.

address eradicating crimes of honour, sending girls to the schools, raising boys and girls equally, and preventing neglect and sexual abuse of children in their work. Just to give few examples, in the last quarter of 2008, the Presidency gave 21 *hutbe*, 1928 *vaaz*, and 177 conferences related to women's rights, human rights, and education of children, and organized two conferences on honour killings in Rize, a city in Black Sea Region.

More importantly, after the Conference of the Müftüs (Müftü is a high ranking official on religious matters in cities and provinces) held in Van (a city in eastern region) May 2008, the Presidency issued Van Final Outcome Document which has received a big coverage in the press. The Outcome Document included two paragraphs relating to the rights of children. In paragraph 6, the forced and early marriages were mentioned in detail. The Document noted that this practices affected girl children very seriously, and it was against religion. It also said that women and men should have 'free will in their decision for marriage,' and 'equal suitability' must also be considered. In paragraph 9, neglect and serious abuse of children were cited in detail. The Outcome Document paid specific attention to the problem of incest. It also pointed out the big and important role of addressing this issue at the societal level. Now, there is a very active group of six women working at the Department of Religious Services Section. Much of the work I mentioned above on women's rights comes from them. All of these developments are very encouraging, and must continue in expanding fashion to address the women's rights.

I am happy to note that our workshops helped to create an atmosphere of discussions on women's rights, changes in legislative system and to draw the attention of participants to the importance of the issue. It has been very interesting to observe the reactions of especially the male participants on gender related topics which they usually were not used to discuss in all-inclusive groups with participants from differing socio-economic-cultural segments of society.

### **Conclusion**

I would like to conclude my article by saying that what we are fighting with is the very picture of dark side of human soul. All of it is heartbreaking, distressing, and cruel. We can only rise above it with hope and correct actions. Peacefulness and persistence in these hard times are crucial to achieve the desired outcome.