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Responses to Information Requests

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14 June 2012

TUR104096.E

Turkey: Situation of Kurds in western cities such as Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Konya and Mersin; resettlement to these cities (2009 - May 2012)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Kurdish Migration to Turkey's Western Cities

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) indicates that Kurds are Turkey's largest ethnic and linguistic minority, constituting the majority of Turkey's eastern and south-eastern region (16 Mar. 2009, 10). Sources range on the number of Kurds in Turkey: according to MRG, Kurds comprise between 10 to 23 percent of the population (MRG 16 Mar. 2009, 10), while the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Factbook states that Kurds constitute 18 percent of the overall population of 79,749,461 (US 23 Apr. 2012). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network, a global research network for scholars, said that in the 1960s and 1970s there were Kurdish economic migrants to western cities (Coordinator 22 May 2012). In the 1990s, there was mass Kurdish migration to western cities due to conflict in the southeast (*ibid.*). Sources indicate that villages were destroyed (Coordinator 22 May 2012; Al Jazeera 8 May 2012), and Kurds were forced to migrate (*ibid.*; Coordinator 22 May 2012; MRG n.d). Sources place the number of internally displaced Kurds between approximately one million (MRG 16 Mar. 2009, 12), to one to four million (Al Jazeera 8 May 2012). According to MRG, these Kurds were mostly displaced in the "early 1990s" from the eastern and south-east region of Turkey (MRG 16 Mar. 2009, 12). Sources state that these internally displaced persons migrated to western cities such as Izmir, Istanbul (US 24 May 2012, 25; MRG 16 Mar. 2009, 12), and Ankara (*ibid.*). According to the Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network, this migration was "politicized" and ethnic divisions became "much more visible" (22 May 2012). He added that there was an increase in Turkish nationalism while Kurds also became more radicalized, and that the Kurdish question, which used to be concentrated in Kurdish areas, moved to western cities (Coordinator 22 May 2012). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Human Rights Association, a non-governmental human rights organization in Ankara (13 Mar. 2008), indicated that Kurds also migrate to western cities for temporary work in sectors such as agriculture and construction (24 May 2012a).

2. General Sentiment in Western Cities

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT) in Ankara indicated that since the March 2009 local elections, there has been an "atmosphere of pressure" against Kurds (14 May 2012). According to the Human Rights Association, continued clashes and a stalemate in the Kurdish issue have led to a "culture of violence" and the "spread of nationalism and chauvinism" (11 Apr. 2012). Similarly, in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, an Associate Professor of History at the University of Akron in Ohio, United States, noted that there is "nationalist backlash" against Kurds living in western cities (23 May 2012). The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network stated that there are "tense ethnic relations" and an "inflamed atmosphere," and that when there's a clash between Turks and Kurds, it's reflected in western cities by Kurds being targeted (22 May 2012).

The Coordinator stated that there is "anti-Kurdish sentiment" in all western cities, but that this sentiment is especially strong in Izmir, Bursa and Trabzon (22 May 2012). He added that Izmir and Trabzon are known to be particularly nationalist, and that Izmir has "recently" become very "anti-Kurdish" (Coordinator 22 May 2012). According to the Associate Professor, a quarter of Istanbul's population are Kurds, and although

discrimination and racism against Kurds occurs in Istanbul, the anti-Kurdish sentiment is not as strong in Istanbul as it is in other cities such as Izmir and Mersin (23 May 2012).

Sources indicate that Kurds often try to hide their Kurdish identity (MRG 16 Mar. 2009; Former KHRP Officer 28 May 2012; Coordinator 22 May 2012). The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network indicated that Kurds who openly disclose their identity will face problems (ibid.). The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011* indicated that "Kurds who publicly or politically asserted their Kurdish identity or promoted using Kurdish in the public domain risked censure, harassment, or prosecution" (24 May 2012, 37). The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network stated that if a person's Kurdish identity and birthplace remain hidden and he or she speaks Turkish well, he or she may be able to "live daily life without major problems" (22 May 2012).

3. Violence

The HRFT representative indicated that, since the local elections in March 2009, armed conflict has increased throughout Turkey (14 May 2012). The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network indicated that hate crimes against Kurds in western cities have taken place along with the rise of Turkish nationalism (22 May 2012). Sources indicate that Kurds are often targeted with violence after incidents occur, for example, if there are clashes in Kurdish regions, or if Turkish soldiers have been killed (Former KHRP Officer 28 May 2012; Coordinator 22 May 2012). The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network indicated that such incidents often cause Turkish nationalists to loot and firebomb stores that are assumed to be owned by Kurds (ibid.). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a former Turkey and Iraq Desk Officer at the Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) indicated that such incidents often result in attacks on Kurds or attacks in Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods (28 May 2012). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a political science professor, who is also the Strong Chair for Middle East Politics at Missouri State University, indicated that in Bursa, Mersin, Antalya, and other cities, Kurds were subjected to "mob violence" after Turkish soldiers were killed by the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) (Professor 23 May 2012). The political science professor added that the "Turkish state does not appear to have encouraged or condoned these episodes, and quickly put a stop to them" (23 May 2012).

The Former KHRP Official indicated that violence is not only reactionary, as daily violence also occurs against Kurds in western cities, and there is "always the chance of an attack" (28 May 2012). He indicated that Kurds in western cities can be violently attacked by disclosing their names, playing Kurdish music, wearing a t-shirt of a Kurdish artist, or even through "simple incidents between humans" that can turn into ethnic conflicts (Former KHRP Officer 28 May 2012). Similarly, the Human Rights Association representative stated that if someone speaks Kurdish in public, they might be attacked (24 May 2012a) and that there have been several attacks on Kurdish migrant agricultural and construction workers in western provinces (24 May 2012b).

Sources highlight Izmir as a particularly violent city for Kurds (Former KHRP Officer 28 May 2012; Coordinator 22 May 2012). The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network stated that Izmir has become very anti-Kurdish, and is a city where Kurdish shops have been burned down by arson (ibid.). According to the Former KHRP Officer, Izmir is "very dangerous" for Kurds, although it was formerly a liberal city (28 May 2012). He added that there have been approximately 20 to 30 attacks on Kurds in different parts of Izmir between 2009-2012, mostly targeting members of Kurdish political parties (Former KHRP Officer 28 May 2012).

The Former KHRP Officer indicated that, along with Izmir, Mersin is another city that is known for violence against Kurds (ibid.). He stated that there are many Turkish nationalists in Mersin, and that the city is divided between these nationalists and politically motivated Kurds (ibid.). The Former KHRP Officer also said that Kurds in Mersin live in ghettos, and that they have been attacked in their neighbourhoods by Turkish nationalists (ibid.).

The Former KHRP Officer indicated that buses going to or from Kurdish regions are sometimes attacked when they pass through Turkish regions (ibid.). For example, he indicated that on 27 May 2012, one day after the PKK attacked a police station, a bus going from Istanbul to a Kurdish region was attacked by Turkish nationalists (ibid.). Further information about this incident could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Former KHRP Officer listed Bursa, Sakarya, Bodrum, and "other cities in central Turkey" as being particularly violent and discriminatory against Kurds, and indicated that violence and discrimination also occur in Istanbul, Ankara, and Konya (ibid.). In 2011, MRG reported racist attacks on Kurds in Hatay, Dörtyol, Bursa and Inegöl (MRG 2011, 203). The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network indicated that Kurdish shops were targeted in Bursa, and that, in Trabzon, Kurdish migrant workers have been subject to "mistreatment" (22 May 2012).

3.1 Lynching

Sources indicate that incidents of lynching and group attacks of Kurds have taken place in western cities (Human Rights Association 1 Nov. 2009; Former KHRP Officer 28 May 2012; Human Rights Association 24 May 2012b; ANF 25 May 2012). The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network indicated that there are lynch mobs and a "lynch mob mentality" in western cities, particularly in Izmir, Mersin and Istanbul (22 May 2012). The Human Rights Association representative estimated that an ethnically-motivated lynch attempt or lynch attack occurs approximately once a week (24 May 2012a).

The Human Rights Association representative indicated that there were "several lynch attempts, murder by unknown assailants, and even extra-judicial killings against Kurdish people" between 2009 and 2012 (24 May 2012b), including a lynch attempt of a Kurd in Istanbul in 2011 (24 May 2012a). The Human Rights Association also reports on lynch attempts against Kurds in the Zeytinburnu District of Istanbul province (11 Apr. 2012). The Former KHRP Officer indicated that Kurdish migrant workers have also been lynched in western cities (28 May 2012).

4. Discrimination

Sources indicate that Kurds in western cities face discrimination (Human Rights Association 24 May 2012a; Former KHRP Official 28 May 2012). The Former KHRP Official indicated that discrimination can occur on a daily basis (ibid.), while the Human Rights Association representative stated that discrimination is "common" (24 May 2012a). The Lebanese newspaper, *The Daily Star*, similarly indicates that racism against Kurds is an "everyday occurrence," and provides the example of graffiti in Istanbul which reads "Exterminate all Kurds" (21 Nov. 2011). The Human Rights Association representative stated that Kurds are discriminated against when they expose their identity, for example, when listening to Kurdish music (24 May 2012a). He also noted that discrimination is particularly high in the summer, due to an increase in Kurdish seasonal agricultural workers (Human Rights Association 24 May 2012a).

According to the Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network, people who openly support Kurdish rights may be discriminated against by government officials (22 May 2012). Similarly, the Former KHRP Officer stated that Kurds face different types of oppression and discrimination by society and government authorities (28 May 2012). For his part, the political science professor at Missouri State University indicated that

Kurds do not face discrimination from government or society as long as they do not parade their Kurdish identity too brazenly. For those who insist on pronouncing their Kurdish rather than Turkish identity, aspects of the Turkish penal code and constitutional articles forbidding the undermining of the unity of the Turkish state and nation, or insulting "Turkishness," or similar injunctions, are often brought to bear. (Professor 23 May 2012)

4.1 Housing

According to the political science professor at Missouri State University, Kurds do not face discrimination in access to housing anywhere in Turkey (23 May 2012). However, according to the Former KHRP Officer, in western cities, people often do not rent out homes to Kurds (28 May 2012). He added that Kurds have to search for sympathizers in order to find homes or shops to rent (Former KHRP Officer 28 May 2012). According to the Human Rights Association, local civil authorities do not allow people to give Kurdish seasonal workers shelter in western provinces; they "drive them out" (1 Nov. 2009).

4.2 Education

Sources indicate that Kurdish students in western cities face discrimination in schools (Former KHRP Officer 28 May 2012; Professor 23 May 2012). According to the Missouri State University political science professor, "Kurds who insist on pursuing studies related to Kurdish history or culture still face penalties and discrimination from teachers and professors" (23 May 2012). According to the Former KHRP Officer, discrimination in schools comes from both teachers and other students, and Kurds may not even be able to send their children to school (28 May 2012). MRG indicates that Kurdish students and teachers tend to hide their identity (16 Mar. 2009, 25). MRG also states that there aren't any independent bodies where students who have been discriminated against can turn to for help (16 Mar. 2009, 25). MRG adds that although each province has a human rights board, according to human rights activists, these boards are "mostly composed of public officials and are not impartial or efficient" (16 Mar. 2009, 25).

According to MRG, displaced Kurdish children "do not have adequate access to education due to poverty" (16 Mar. 2009, 12). Human Rights Association also indicates that children of forced migrants are deprived of education, and state that some children live and work in the streets (1 Nov. 2009).

4.3 Employment

Sources indicate that Kurds are discriminated against when seeking employment (Professor 23 May 2012; Former KHRP Officer 28 May 2012; Coordinator 22 May 2012). According to the Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network, Kurds in western cities "struggle" to find employment, and the challenges of finding employment have been increasing (ibid.). He added that even if the Kurdish job-seeker does not disclose a Kurdish identity, this can be discovered through the person's accent or through finding out where the person was born (ibid.). MRG reports that a Kurdish-Alevi teacher stated that minority teachers who disclose their identity "would never get a managerial position" (16 Mar. 2009, 25). The Former KHRP Officer added that Kurds may be bullied by their employers, lose their jobs, and not be able to start a business because nobody will rent them a place to start the business (28 May 2012).

4.4 Health Care

According to the Missouri State University political science professor, Kurds do not face discrimination in the health care sector (23 May 2012). However, according to the Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network, discrimination against Kurds in health care depends on the doctor, and if the patient supports Kurdish rights, the risk of discrimination in health care increases (22 May 2012). He added that Kurds who do not speak Turkish, especially the older generation, may not be able to access health care services, as translation is not available in hospitals (Coordinator 22 May 2012).

5. Police Treatment of Kurds in Western Cities

The Former KHRP Officer indicated that police in western cities have "negative attitudes" towards Kurds, and indicated that often when police witness incidents against Kurds, they do not protect them, and that sometimes police use violence and discriminate against Kurds (28 May 2012). Sources indicate that during an argument on 11 May 2010 (HRFT 7-9 Apr. 2012), a Kurdish university student was shot and killed by police (ibid.; Human Rights Association 24 May 2012b). The HRFT indicated that the lawyer of the defendant told the court that the "police officer did his job in the context of self-defense" and that the court adjourned the hearing until 25 May 2012 (7-9 Apr. 2012). According to the Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network, police mistreatment could occur anywhere, but particularly during Kurdish demonstrations or gatherings (22 May 2012). Sources report on the use of violence against protestors at demonstrations (US 24 May 2012, 2; Human Rights Watch 2012, 505; EUTCC Feb. 2010), and the criminalization of protestors (ibid.; Human Rights Watch 2012, 505). According to Human Rights Watch, "[t]oo often the authorities mask the problem by investigating demonstrators for resisting police dispersal, joining unlawful demonstrations, or terrorist propaganda, rather than investigating allegations of police abuse..." (ibid.).

On 10 February 2009, Al Jazeera's televised program, *The Witness*, indicated that Kurdish women have been abducted and raped by men believed to be law enforcement officials. Istanbul-based news source, *Bianet*, states that, according to the Istanbul Women Platform, sexual abuse and rape is used by police to try to silence Kurdish women (29 June 2010).

Sources indicate that Kurds usually do not report mistreatment against them to police, partly due to perceived inaction by the police (Coordinator 22 May 2012; Former KHRP Officer 28 May 2012). The Former KHRP Officer explained that the mistreatment goes unreported because the laws are not effective, Kurds do not receive protection, and due to fears of job loss if there was an investigation, or fears that they will be "singled out" by the police because of their ethnicity or political opinion (ibid.). The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network indicated that Kurds fear that they will be detained instead of the perpetrator (22 May 2012). The University of Akron Associate Professor of History stated that a Kurd can be arrested based on accusations without due process, such as if someone states that a Kurd is a supporter of the PKK (23 May 2012).

According to the Missouri State University political science professor, Turkish police "pursue and investigate crimes against Kurds in Western Turkey, with occasional and rare exceptions" (23 May 2012). However, the Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network indicated that cases of abuse against Kurds usually remain unresolved (22 May 2012). He said that cases are often "shelved" and expire after 10-15 years, and that in cases that are prosecuted, the charges are often reduced and sentences are shortened (Coordinator 22 May 2012). The Former KHRP Officer also stated that perpetrators of crimes against Kurds are rarely punished, but that when they are arrested they are usually released "shortly afterwards" (28 May 2012). The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network added that Kurds can report abuse to human rights associations, but that this is not effective due to the "biased judicial system" (22 May 2012). He indicated that human rights associations keep records, try to "raise consciousness," and may take some complaints to the European Court of Human Rights (Coordinator 22 May 2012).

5.1 Identity Cards

According to the Missouri State University political science professor, Kurds whose identity cards list their city of origin "definitely face greater scrutiny at random police road blocks and security sweeps, and are more quickly identified as suspects when crime occurs" (23 May 2012). The University of Akron Associate Professor of History similarly states that young men and women are "viewed with suspicion" because of their birth place when their identity cards are examined (23 May 2012).

5.2 Arrests

The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network stated that in western cities there is an increasing atmosphere of suspicion of Kurds (22 May 2012). Sources indicate that promoters of Kurdish rights are often considered to be terrorists (MRG n.d; Coordinator 22 May 2012). According to Human Rights Watch, Turkey has an "overbroad definition of terrorism" which "allows for arbitrary imposition of the harshest terrorism charges against individuals about whom there is little evidence of logistical or material support for terrorism or of involvement in plotting violent activities" (2012, 504). Sources indicate that Turkey has a disproportionately high rate of arrests due to alleged terrorism (European Commission 9 Nov. 2010, 35; Al Jazeera 8 May 2012).

According to the Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network, hundreds of Kurds have been arrested, some on "flimsy grounds" (22 May 2012). Sources indicate that people have been arrested for allegedly having links to an organization that is considered to be the "urban branch" of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) (MRG 2011, 203; Human Rights Watch 2012, 504; OMCT 25 Oct. 2011), called the Kurdish Communities Union (KCK) (ibid.; MRG 2011, 203). For more information on the KCK and the PKK, please see RIR TUR104075.E.

The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network stated that the state has been targeting people that they say are part of the urban wing of the PKK over the past two years, since negotiations with the PKK failed (22 May 2012). Al Jazeera similarly states that "hundreds of Kurds," including politicians, have been arrested for allegedly being part of the urban wing of the PKK (9 June 2011). In 2011, individuals allegedly linked to the KCK were reportedly arrested in western cities, such as Ankara (Kurd Net 13 Feb. 2012) and Istanbul (ibid.; OMCT 25 Oct. 2011), and the police raided pro-Kurdish political activists in Istanbul and Izmir (*New York Times* 21 Dec. 2011). Human Rights Watch indicated that hundreds of members of the Kurdish political party Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) are in pre-trial detention and "thousands are on trial for terrorism charges" for alleged links to the KCK (2012, 504).

The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network indicated that academics, hundreds of politicians, and 91 Kurdish journalists or journalists who write in Kurdish newspapers are in prison (22 May 2012). Kurd Net, an independent news portal based in Austria (Kurd Net n.d), states that students, human rights activists, and union members are also detained (13 Feb. 2012). Sources indicate that Kurdish children have also been arrested (Kurd Net 13 Feb. 2012; EUTCC Feb. 2010; Al Jazeera 8 May 2012). According to Al Jazeera, many Kurdish children have been arrested under Turkey's anti-terror law, for reasons such as throwing stones and attending funerals of PKK members (ibid.).

According to the Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network, sometimes Kurds are arrested at protests, such as when they have not been granted permission to protest at a location (Coordinator 22 May 2012). A Human Rights Association report indicates that in March 2012 during the Kurdish New Year, Newroz, celebrations were banned in 129 places (2 Apr. 2012). The report also indicated that during Newroz, police raided people's homes, arrested them, and used gas bombs and "pressured water" at demonstrations (Human Rights Association 2 Apr. 2012). The report also highlights the use of violence against BDP deputies by law enforcement officers (ibid.). The Human Rights Association provides the following statistics from the Newroz celebrations:

- In Istanbul, 1 person was killed, 26 wounded, 179 detained, and 23 arrested
- In Izmir, 42 people were detained and 21 arrested including 8 children
- In Mersin, 8 people were wounded, 53 detained, and 9 arrested
- In Ankara, 10 people were detained (2 Apr. 2012).

The Coordinator of the Kurdish Studies Network indicated that, once arrested, Kurds are often mistreated and tortured, and often their cases do not get to court (22 May 2012). According to Al Jazeera, Kurdish children in jail may be subjected to intimidation, violence and sexual abuse (8 May 2012).

5.3 Court

Sources indicate that Kurds are prohibited from defending themselves in the Kurdish language in court (Coordinator 22 May 2012; MRG 2011, 203; EUTCC 29 Jan. 2011). *Country Reports 2011* states that there are inconsistent court decisions regarding the use of the Kurdish language in courts (24 May 2012, 17).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Oral sources: Attempts to contact the following organizations and individuals were unsuccessful: author and professor in Turkey, Center for the Research of Societal Problems; Human Rights Foundation of Turkey – Istanbul, Izmir, Van; Human Rights Watch (Europe and Central Asia Division); Istanbul University Centre for Research and Practice in Human Rights Law; Kurdish Human Rights Project; Mazlumder; professor at San

Francisco State University, two professors at the University of Utrecht; *Today's Zaman*; Washington Kurdish Institute; Yeni Ozgur Politika. A representative from the Middle East Media Research Institute was unable to provide an answer for this Response.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; Alliance for Kurdish Rights; Australia Refugee Review Tribunal; *British Broadcasting Corporation*; Congressional Research Service; *Daily News*; ecoi.net; Eurasianet.org; European Journal for Turkish Studies; Freedom House; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre; International Crisis Group; Kanal 7; Jamestown Foundation; Kurdish Human Rights Project; Middle East Media Research Institute; *The Nation*; *Today's Zaman*; Turkey – General Command of the Gendarmerie, Ministries of Interior Affairs, Health, Justice, Labour and Social Security, National Education; United Nations Refworld.

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