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terrorism and violence generated great excitement in Turkey. I am filled with this excitement as well, because the end of violence signifies achieving much higher levels of human rights, democracy, development and foreign policy.

We definitely do not disregard the social and economic problems behind terrorism while we silence the guns. We regard the problems and demands of our Kurdish citizens as a human rights issue, independent of terrorism. We have witnessed that each step we have taken in human rights issues has narrowed the fields of abuse by terrorism. We rejected policies of neglect and alienation, as we consider all citizens of our country as equal. Nothing can be achieved with terrorism, guns and violence. Our recent initiative aims to silence the guns for good and let the politics and ideas speak. We are open to all ideas and regard the expression of any

It has always been on our minds to elevate human rights in our country to international standards and ensure a peaceful life for our people.

non-violent idea as freedom of expression. We guarantee to ensure the function of all democratic methods to allow our citizens to enjoy this fundamental right without discrimination.

Human Rights in Practice

Basic Developments

Our reform strategy, which aims to establish the infrastructure needed to entrench respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, includes three main elements. These are: making the necessary amendments in legislation, accession to international conventions on human rights and ensuring an effective practice of reforms. To this end, nine harmonisation and reform packages between 2002 and 2006, and a number of constitutional amendments in May 2004, were adopted. Many legal and administrative regulations have been introduced as well.

The constitutional amendments adopted with the 12 September 2010 referendum introduced new rights for citizens, expanded the scope of current constitutional rights, introduced mechanisms

to protect constitutional rights, strengthened the state of law, restructured the Constitutional Court and the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors to approximate their equivalence in the democratic world, limited the jurisdiction of military courts and introduced individual application to the Constitutional Court.

The 'Fourth Judicial Package' reform bill, which included additional improvements in freedom of expression, was adopted by the Grand National Assembly on 11 April 2013. This package aims to further strengthen the legal framework concerning freedom of expression by inserting the relevant basic parameters of the European Court of Human Rights into the penal code. Turkey's Human Rights Institution and the Public Monitoring Institution (the Ombudsman's Office) were established. The Ombudsman's Office has been accepting applications since 29 March 2013.

Moreover, The Human Rights Inquiry Committee, which also functions as a national monitoring board, is actively working under the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The Committee inspects onsite the conditions of prisons and other corrective facilities, works in cooperation with NGOs and submits their findings to the Government for any necessary measures.



In spite of all the legal reforms, what Turkey indeed needs is a new constitution. We have had three different constitutions until now, none of which was prepared in a regular process with democratic participation. The post-coup constitutions allow for a limited democratisation and improvement of human rights. Therefore, we started working on a new constitution in 2012. We will prepare a constitution that represents civilian power and encompasses the diverse values in our society. Human rights will certainly be a key in this constitution.

In addition, we made comprehensive reforms in cultural rights, which is a significant part of human rights. We prepared the ground for private courses teaching the different languages and

dialects spoken by Turkish citizens in daily life, and broadcasting in these languages in audio-visual media. TRT-6, a public TV channel, has been broadcasting 24 hours a day in Kurdish and Zazaki since January 2009.

Women's rights and combating violence against women are among our priorities. During our chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, we spearheaded the preparatory work on Istanbul Convention (Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence), which was the first international document concerning violence against women. Turkey is the first country to sign and ratify this convention. The Law to Protect Family and Prevent Violence against Women was ratified on International Women's Day on 8 March 2012. The law aims to protect women, children and family members who are exposed to or are at risk of being exposed to violence, to protect victims of stalking and to prevent oppression and violence against these persons.

The difference between legal regulations and implementations is important; we have regarded human rights as a comprehensive and inclusive right of our people.

We have increased our efforts to improve human rights awareness through education. Today, human rights issues are a part of the primary school curriculum in Turkey, and democracy and human rights are part

of elective courses at high schools. Various universities opened human rights centres. *Human Rights* is a compulsory course in the Police Academy and part of the training programmes for public service employee candidates. In this context, 2011 and 2012 alone, approximately 52,000 security personnel participated in human rights training programmes.

The intensive process of reform we have initiated within Turkey at the beginning of the 2000s includes endeavours pertaining to different religious groups and minorities as well. We now prefer the phrase 'different faith groups' to the expression 'non-Muslim' employed in the Treaty of Lausanne. Under the Treaty of Lausanne, our citizens of different faith groups possess their own schools, places of worship, foundations, hospitals and media.

Recently, as part of the extensive reforms in human rights and democracy, we made some regulations that will improve the legislation concerning our citizens of different faith groups. Since issues related to pious foundations (*waqf*) of communities are within my area of responsibility, I am able to provide precise information on this subject. With regulations concerning the foundations of communities, dated 2003, 2008 and 2011, we considerably improved the property rights of the congregation foundations. The amendments in the Law on Foundations in 2008 and 2011 sanctioned the return of properties of 165 minority foundations that had been seized in the past for various reasons. 111 properties were registered and monetary compensation was paid for 15 properties.

I am following this issue in person and we are returning these properties, not for any reciprocity or expectation, but simply out of consideration that these people are part of Turkey. We wish to do what must be done for justice. Moreover, the Directorate General for Foundations has finished

restoring five churches, while the restoration of two synagogues and four churches is still going on. The Prinkipo Greek Orphanage in Büyükada was registered under the Greek Patriarchate. The Soumela Monastery is open for worship once a year since 2010. Similarly, since 2010, a service is held each year at the Akdamar Church that is much valued by the Armenians. Lastly, we permitted the reopening of the Greek school in Gökçeada and are still working on the issue of the Halki Seminary.

387 places of worship belonging to different faith groups are currently active in Turkey. There are no work restrictions for foreign clergymen with work visas. It is not a crime for an individual to engage in activities to spread his religious beliefs in Turkey. On the contrary, it is a crime to prevent an individual by threat or coercion from expressing or spreading his religious

We cannot accept the fact that final decisions for the problems faced by the people all around the world are up to these five permanent members, especially when we are talking about human rights.

belief. We regard minorities, different faith groups and foreigners as part of and a fortune to our country. We do not discriminate against them; on the contrary, we are being criticised for positive discrimination concerning these people. We often convene with representatives of different faith groups, listen to their problems, and try to solve them in accordance with the law and our capabilities.

Human Rights and Social Welfare

Of course human rights is not only about freedom of expression, faith and demonstration. Everyone has the right to food, clothing, housing and medical care for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, as enshrined in Article 25 of the



Universal Declaration of Human Rights. During times of economic crises, initial cuts are directed at social policies. This often means pushing aside those in need into worse life conditions. I know that the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights urged EU members to remain on guard against the increase in human rights violations during the Eurozone crisis.

We should not forget that enjoying such rights as health, education, food, housing and receiving social services are basic human rights. Without ignoring these areas, Turkey has undergone some radical changes in the sphere of economic and social rights during the last decade. This success has also increased the opportunities available to Turkish citizens receive in the aforementioned areas.

We have constructed a brand new Turkey and have left behind the image of a country, which experienced tremendous crises in 2001, in which conflicts can be triggered by tiny issues. Today, Turkey is the 16th largest economy in the world and the 6th largest economy in Europe. I mentioned earlier about our fight against poverty. In 2002, the proportion of the population which received

less than US \$4.3 in a day was 30.3%. We decreased this figure to 2.7% in 2011. While the per capita income was US \$3,500 in 2002, in 2012, this figure surpassed US \$10,500. The inflation rate was 65% in 2002, now we have a single digit inflation rate, which was recorded as 6.2% in 2012.

I also mentioned corruption. We worked to eliminate conditions from which corruption could emerge. Therefore, the Turkish economy, which grew only by 3% between 1993-2002, grew by approximately 6.1% between 2003-2010. Our GNP, which was US \$230 billion in 2002, reached US \$772 billion in 2012. Our exports, which amounted to approximately US \$36 billion in 2002, rose to US \$151 billion in 2012.

Those who see these basic economic indicators ask us how we have succeeded. If you have economic problems, then you will certainly have problems concerning democracy, foreign policy and human rights. In this regard, we consider that our people deserve good governance. We have to accept this fact: the economy is still the top priority for mankind. When you disturb the economic balance and cannot manage to govern well, you could face unexpected actions and incidents. Political power can shift. Patriotism, honesty and human rights can be forgotten in the blink of an eye. In our 11th year of power, we received the votes of 21,5 million citizens, equivalent to 50% of the overall votes. We have been displaying accountability and transparency as a political power for which every one person out of two has voted. In other words, we are happy to see our citizens exercise greater control over us.

It has also been possible to increase expenditures in such areas as health, education and housing, thanks to economic progress. While the Ministry of Health's budget was US \$2.2 billion in 2002, we have increased this amount to US \$8 billion in 2011. We have opened 2021 new health facilities between 2003 and 2011. Our citizens no longer have to wait in queues for hours, and they receive health service in the shortest time possible and get immediate treatment in emergency services. We have extended the scope of health insurances. We provide state guaranteed health services until age 18.

Before we came to the power, the security and defence sector was receiving the biggest share of the budget. We have raised the Ministry of National Education's budget, which was US \$4.2 billion in 2002, to US \$19 billion in 2011, hence, this has become the biggest sector. We have built 170,000 new classrooms. The education system in Turkey has gone through a radical change and has been equipped with the latest technology. Students in primary and secondary education get their textbooks for free. We have facilitated a nine-fold increase in the scholarships granted to primary and secondary school students whose families have financial difficulties. While the number of public and private universities in 2002 was 76, it has risen to 168 with the 92 newly founded universities during our term.



We have supported the construction of 544,887 housing units through the Housing Development Administration of Turkey (TOKİ). We, in cooperation with TOKİ, have invested nearly US \$25 billion with the aim of providing our citizens with affordable quality housing facilities. As I have mentioned, the difference between legal regulations and

implementations is important; we have regarded human rights as a comprehensive and inclusive right of our people. We keep the scope of human rights as wide as possible, and implement one by one what is written down in the papers.

Human Rights and Foreign Policy

The human rights issue is a fundamental aspect which shapes our foreign policy. We have supported the Arab Spring from the very beginning, since we regard it as fundamental and legitimate demands by people living in those countries. We have evaluated the fall of certain oppressive regimes as a positive step towards the restoration of basic human rights.

In this context, Turkey has approached the developments taking place in Syria through the same perspective. Some countries, as

well as the opposition parties in Turkey, are questioning the change in our stance towards the Assad regime, with which we previously had close relations. The reason for this is quite clear; we have warned the Assad regime, first in a friendly manner, when we saw that the democratic rights and demands of the Syrian people were not being met by the oppressive regime; nonetheless, we had to change our approach when we saw that the situation continued regardless of our warnings. Our aim is to help provide the Syrian people with their rights. We have opened our borders to these people deprived of their basic rights. Although international support to these people is extremely limited, we have hosted 200,000 refugees and 332,000 Syrian people in total thus far.

What is more, we have displayed a similar attitude towards the rightful cause of the Palestinian people and have exerted efforts with the aim of providing Palestine with the 'non-member observer state' status in the United Nations. Our primary objective is to help people live in a world in which they can all enjoy their basic human rights. For this reason, we do our best to stand against the injustices all over the world. We support human rights in every way that we can.

In this context, we expect non-discriminatory and objective action from international organisations. We do not think the current structure of the United Nations is capable enough. We have witnessed the political interests of the permanent members causing the international community to act too late or to remain unresponsive towards the incidents in Bosnia, Syria, and during the Arab Spring. Tens of thousands of people have died and millions of people have been displaced due to lost time and late responses. We cannot accept the fact that final decisions for the problems faced by the people all around the world are up to these five permanent members, especially when we are talking about human rights.

Conclusion

I have attempted to explain in detail the legal framework and implementation processes with regard to human rights in Turkey. These are examples of how historic transformation is reflected