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Submission to the UN

Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED)
Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID)

Turkey's Use of Enforced Disappearances as a Tool of Transnational Repression

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Solidarity With OTHERS

Solidarity With OTHERS, Brussels-based non-profit advocacy organization, was founded by a group of lawyers, human rights defenders, and victims of government oppression in Turkey. Driven by the ambition to shed light on human rights violations in Turkey, its mission has expanded to serve as a voice for people who are unable to be heard in the EU and beyond. Its name reflects the organization's unwavering commitment to act in solidarity with those who have been subjected to injustice and violations, regardless of race, religious beliefs, social affiliation, or political views. OTHERS focuses on raising awareness about injustices and advocating for the rights of those affected by oppression.

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1. How do enforced disappearances occur in the context of transnational repression, and which individuals are most at risk?

1. Turkey's repression of political dissidents has expanded into a global campaign since the failed coup attempt in July 2016, and Turkey has employed a broad range of coercive tactics, including extrajudicial abductions, unlawful renditions, enforced disappearances, espionage, diplomatic pressure, and the misuse of asset-freezing measures. Authorities have also manipulated international legal mechanisms, most notably through the abuse of INTERPOL Red Notices and the extradition process.
2. A central element of this strategy has been the enforced disappearances and forced repatriation of dissidents, particularly those associated with the faith-based Gülen movement, inspired by cleric Fethullah Gülen. Individuals affiliated with the movement remain today the primary targets of Turkey's transnational repression, facing the highest risk of abduction, enforced disappearance, and unlawful rendition compared to other dissident groups[1].
3. According to documented cases, Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MİT) has carried out operations resulting in the forcible return of at least 128 individuals with alleged links to the movement since 2016.[2] Turkey's diplomatic missions have repeatedly been implicated in coordinated operations targeting critics and dissidents abroad, serving not merely as consular offices but as logistical hubs, intelligence outposts, and pressure points for host governments. These missions have played a central role in facilitating extrajudicial actions against individuals under international protection, often bypassing legal norms and undermining the sovereignty of host states.
4. Victims of Turkish intelligence operations have been abducted, secretly detained, and denied access to legal safeguards, with their whereabouts often concealed. Many were held incommunicado before being transferred to Turkey, practices that meet the definition of enforced disappearance under international law. These intelligence operations circumvented

[1] Turkey Tribunal, Abductions in Turkey Today, July, 2021
[2] Anadolu Ajansi, Adalet Bakanı Tunç: 15 Temmuz'da son darbeyi vuracaklarını zannettiler, başaramadılar, July 15, 2025

judicial oversight and relied on covert cooperation with governments in countries where rule-of-law protections are weak or compromised.

5. These victims have been subjected to serious human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, raids on their homes, torture, and other forms of ill-treatment. Many were held in undisclosed locations for extended periods, during which they were denied access to legal counsel and contact with their families, practices that constitute enforced disappearance under international law. Some of the enforced disappearance victims in Turkey have spoken out in court, after they were found in police custody, recounting the systematic and severe torture they were subjected to during their interrogation by government operatives, who, victims said, waited until their wounds had healed to hand them over to the police.
6. For instance, Orhan İnandı, who was the founder and director of the prestigious Sapat school network operating in Kyrgyzstan, was kidnapped on May 31 and remained missing for weeks. On July 5, President Erdoğan publicly acknowledged that İnandı had been abducted by MİT and praised the intelligence agency for its role in the operation. Footage released by Turkish state media showed İnandı in handcuffs in front of Turkish flags, appearing visibly emaciated and with a swollen right hand, prompting allegations of torture and ill-treatment.
7. Similarly, Koray Vural was abducted in Dushanbe on September 16, 2023, in an operation reportedly coordinated by Turkish intelligence. He remained missing for 20 days, with no official confirmation of his whereabouts during that period. On October 5, 2023, the state-run Anadolu news agency published a photo of Vural in handcuffs, flanked by Turkish flags, reporting that he had been forcibly returned from Tajikistan to Turkey as part of a MİT-led operation. Despite residing legally in Tajikistan for nearly three decades and seeking resettlement through a United Nations program, Vural was abducted without judicial oversight and returned to Turkey under opaque circumstances[3].
8. Selahaddin Gülen, a nephew of Fethullah Gülen, had been forcibly returned to Turkey by agents from Turkey's intelligence agency in May 2021. Kenyan authorities remained silent regarding the abduction and any potential involvement in the operation. Gülen disappeared on May 3 and was held in an undisclosed location until May 31, when the Turkish government publicly acknowledged the operation and confirmed his transfer to Turkey. Shortly thereafter,

[3] Turkish Minute, "MİT abducted Turkish businessman sought over Gülen links from Tajikistan," September 18, 2023

in June, he was brought before an Ankara court and formally arrested on charges of establishing and leading an armed terrorist organization[4].

2. Which national, regional, or international laws, practices, or (bilateral) agreements contribute to or prevent such acts?

9. In 2012 and 2014, the Turkish government amended Law No. 2937, which defines the activities of the MİT. These changes expanded the immunity of MİT officials from criminal investigations, even in cases where intelligence operations allegedly involve unlawful activities, and established a requirement that prosecutors obtain the permission of the government before pursuing any probe against MİT officials. In Turkey, this provision creates a legal shield that undermines accountability, making it difficult to investigate or prosecute agents involved in serious rights violations.
10. Following the July 15 coup attempt, the government on July 20 declared a state of emergency, and the government's decrees under the state of emergency absolved government officials of any responsibility for abuses in connection with duties carried out in the context of the decrees. In addition, these regulations also allowed broad powers for detention and facilitated illegal intelligence operations abroad, weakening judicial oversight.
11. The Turkish government has carried out its operations abroad by means of its intelligence agency and diplomatic missions. To this end, MİT has established a separate unit and concluded secret security cooperation agreements with the secret services of host states that facilitate the enforced disappearances of Turkish nationals living abroad. According to reports, some embassies have also provided logistics and planning for the forcible returns.
12. Turkish officials have routinely presented such activities as legitimate diplomatic functions while Turkey's transnational repression campaign has drawn widespread criticism from Western governments and human rights organizations. Former Vice President Fuat Oktay openly acknowledged in a parliamentary speech that Turkish agents had conducted "intelligence diplomacy" with their counterparts in countries where abductions and enforced

[4] Solidarity with OTHERS, "Forced Returns and Broken Protections: The Kenyan-Turkish crackdown on refugees," October 2024

disappearances occurred, an admission that blurs the line between traditional diplomacy and covert operations.[5]

13. As part of its "intelligence diplomacy" strategy, Turkey has concluded bilateral security cooperation agreements with multiple countries. These agreements have contained deliberately vague language and enabled the expulsion, rendition, or even enforced disappearances of Turkish nationals living abroad. According to a joint letter from UN special rapporteurs in 2020, Turkey has signed secretive bilateral security agreements with countries such as Kosovo, Pakistan, Albania, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Gabon, Kazakhstan, and Lebanon. These agreements often include copy-paste clauses that are vaguely phrased to allow for expedited deportation without due process, covert intelligence operations, and transfer of suspects outside formal extradition channels. This ambiguity allowed Turkish authorities to circumvent international legal norms, especially in countries with weak rule of law or authoritarian leanings.[6]

3. Which mechanisms exist—or are lacking—to ensure investigation, prosecution, and mutual legal assistance in cases of transnational enforced disappearances?

14. The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), UN treaty bodies such as the Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED), and regional frameworks like the European Investigation Order provide a legal basis and assistance mechanisms for addressing cases of transnational enforced disappearances.
15. However, several states have not yet ratified the ICPPED, which weakens the global reach of the convention's legal obligations and creates safe havens where perpetrators may evade accountability by weakening international cooperation mechanisms. In addition, the absence of enforcement powers within UN bodies leaves substantial gaps in effective cross-border accountability and has negative impacts on the efforts to achieve consistent compliance with international obligations.

[5] Bold Medya, "Cumhurbaşkanı Yardımcısı Fuat Oktay Meclis'te adam kaçırmayı doğruladı: MİT 100 kişiyi getirdi," November 25, 2022

[6] Joint UN letter: link

16. Cases of Turkey's transnational enforced disappearances have demonstrated that relevant UN mechanisms have failed to provide adequate protection for victims, while the governments of countries in which Turkish intelligence agents have targeted government critics have often ignored decisions or requests from UN agencies as well as international and local human rights organizations.
17. One reason for the stance of these countries is the importance the Turkish government attaches to illegal transnational repression, which aligns with President Erdoğan's priorities in domestic policy. According to human rights defenders, Turkey's practice of illegal transnational enforced disappearances is unlikely to end as long as President Erdoğan remains in power. Transnational intelligence operations are a high priority for President Erdoğan, and the Turkish government is willing to sacrifice other foreign policy objectives and provide financial assistance to certain countries to persuade them to forcibly transfer government critics.
18. The experience of Turkey's transnational enforced disappearances proves the urgent need for dedicated cross-border investigative organizations or a new UN mechanism with the authority to act swiftly. Such bodies could guarantee that violations are documented professionally by experts, perpetrators are pursued across borders in line with the investigation findings, and governments are compelled to uphold their international obligations, thereby reducing the safe havens used by authoritarian governments for their transnational repression policies.
19. Moreover, the UN could establish a new mechanism to prevent the accreditation of Turkish diplomats to international and regional organizations if they have been involved in Turkey's transnational repression operations.

4. Which measures should States adopt to ensure effective protection, truth, justice, and reparation for victims and their relatives?

20. Turkish and Kosovar intelligence operatives, along with the Turkish Embassy in Pristina, were reportedly involved in the forcible return of six Turkish nationals from Kosovo in 2018. According to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), the entire operation was planned and carried out by the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, which had

assumed police authority and taken control of police offices[7]. Following the incident, the Kosovar Parliamentary Investigation Commission launched an investigation. A commission report concluded that the deportation was illegal and that the Constitution was violated 31 times during the arrests. Days after the six men were expelled, Kosovo's then-prime minister, Ramush Haradinaj, dismissed the country's interior minister and secret service chief because he was not told the six would be deported to Turkey. In addition, the Basic Court in Pristina handed down a prison sentence of four years, eight months to Driton Gashi in July 2023.[8]

21. Unlike Kosovo, Turkish intelligence operations involving enforced disappearances in other countries abroad haven't prompted internal legal proceedings despite repeated documentation by UN bodies and human rights organizations. Therefore, the UN shall urge these countries to incorporate comprehensive measures into their domestic regulations that guarantee protection, truth, justice, and reparation for victims and their relatives.
22. To this end, enforced disappearances should be criminalized as an autonomous crime in their domestic legal framework by host countries. Host country governments should provide comprehensive assistance and protection to victims, their families, and witnesses. Furthermore, host countries should be encouraged to develop robust initiatives aimed at raising awareness among security personnel and legal professionals. These initiatives could be supported through funding from international and regional organizations, enhancing institutional capacity to effectively prevent and address such violations.
23. As documented in Turkey's transnational cases by human rights organizations, families have suffered both material and psychological harm. Therefore, local authorities should plan a detailed reparation process for compensation and rehabilitation of victims and their families.

5. How can international organizations such as INTERPOL strengthen safeguards against misuse of their mechanisms?

24. The Turkish government has systematically abused international channels, including the extradition process, INTERPOL Red Notices, and diplomatic correspondence, to facilitate their unlawful return to Turkey.

[7] WGAD Opinion: No. 47/2020, link
[8] Turkish Minute, Former Kosovo intel chief sentenced to prison due to role in illegal deportation of Gülenists, July 19, 2023

25. The Turkish government has used INTERPOL's International Notice System, such as Red Notices and diffusions, and the Stolen and Lost Travel Documents Database (SLTD) by filing tens of thousands of notifications for critics and opponents who, in many instances, were unaware that their passports had been invalidated. In several cases, some of these people were stranded at international airports or put in detention before they were released or, in the worst cases, were handed over to Turkish operatives and ended up in Turkish prisons. The government also filed hundreds of information requests on foreign companies through INTERPOL, alleging the involvement of well-known brands in funding terrorism, without reasonable grounds to support such requests[9].
26. In this regard, INTERPOL should implement new regulatory safeguards designed to prevent the misuse of its mechanisms. A key safeguard would be the implementation of a stricter review process for Red Notices and diffusions before their release. Independent panels need to be tasked with assessing whether requests are supported by credible evidence of criminal activity rather than political dissent. This would help ensure that politically motivated notices are rejected in the beginning. In addition, the organization should share the number of Red Notices and diffusions rejected or withdrawn, together with the data identifying states that disproportionately submit politically motivated requests. Ensuring that individuals have timely access to information about notices filed against them would provide an important safeguard against abuse.
27. Human rights standards and norms should be fully integrated into INTERPOL procedures, and the organization shall align its practices with international human rights law, explicitly prohibiting the use of its mechanisms to target exiled dissidents. Raising staff awareness to recognize patterns of transnational repression would also contribute to preventing abuse at the operational level.
28. Besides the abuse of the INTERPOL mechanism, Turkish diplomats pursue smear campaigns against opponents and demand their deportation, citing the alleged absence of valid international travel documents. As seen in some cases, the Turkish diplomatic missions have submitted false notices accusing government critics of possessing fraudulent passports issued by third countries.

[9] Stockholm Center for Freedom, Turkey's Abuse of INTERPOL: How Erdoğan Weaponized the International Criminal Police Organization for Transnational Repression, August 24, 2021

29. Osman Karaca, the former director of the Zaman International School in Cambodia, affiliated with the Gülen movement, was detained in Phnom Penh on October 14, 2019, by Cambodian counterterrorism police at the request of the Turkish Embassy. Karaca, a dual Mexican-Turkish national, was visiting Cambodia on a business trip, using his Mexican passport. According to the police report, the Turkish diplomatic mission submitted a false notice accusing Karaca of possessing a fraudulent Mexican passport. To secure his release from detention and ward off an attempt at an illegal extradition, the Mexican Embassy in Hanoi, accredited to Cambodia, had to convey a note verbale to prove Karaca's Mexican citizenship and attach a copy of his passport in its communication to Cambodian authorities. However, Karaca was forcibly deported to Turkey after being subjected to enforced disappearance for several days[10].
30. Relevant UN agencies should urge member states to establish robust domestic safeguards to prevent and address fraudulent actions carried out by Turkish diplomats, particularly those that facilitate enforced disappearances. Additionally, international and regional organizations should refrain from granting accreditation to Turkish diplomats who have been involved in Turkey's transnational repression, as seen in the abovementioned case.

6. Are there positive examples of domestic or international cooperation that have effectively prevented or addressed enforced disappearances in a transnational context?

31. Although Turkey's intelligence agency has attempted to carry out enforced disappearances abroad, international oversight mechanisms, domestic judicial safeguards, and active involvement of local and international media and rights organizations have proven effective in preventing or addressing such abuses. Some cases highlight the importance of strong legal frameworks and coordinated cooperation between local communities and institutions in resisting Turkey's unlawful initiatives when these efforts are facilitated by complicit local intelligence services or exploited through gaps in international mechanisms.
32. In July 2018, Veysel Akçay, then-general director of schools affiliated with the Gülen movement in Mongolia, was abducted by agents of MİT in front of his house in Ulan Bator.

[10] Nordic Monitor, Security agreement facilitates Turkey's intelligence operations in Cambodia, October 28, 2020

Up to five men grabbed Akçay, 50, threw him into a minibus outside his residence, and took him to the city's airport, eyewitnesses said. Groups of supporters had gathered at Genghis Khan airport holding signs demanding his release on July 28, 2018, and human rights activists in the country spoke out publicly, urging the government to take action against the abduction, which they believed was politically motivated[11].

33. After reactions from the Mongolian public and media, Mongolian authorities did not allow MİT agents to transfer Akçay from Ulan Bator to Turkey. Akçay was released after Mongolian authorities temporarily grounded a Turkish aircraft, bearing the call sign TT4010, which had been prepared to facilitate his unlawful transfer. On the same day, the Mongolian Foreign Ministry issued a statement regarding the abduction of Akçay, stressing that such an act constituted "a violation of Mongolia's sovereignty and independence" and affirming that the country would strongly oppose it.
34. In addition to the Akçay case, the involvement of media outlets and organizations such as the NBA in preventing the enforced deportation of Enes Kanter, then a forward for the NBA Oklahoma City Thunder team, represents another example of effective cooperation. The Turkish Embassy in Bucharest played a central role in the cancellation of Enes Kanter's passport in May 2017, which led to his detention by Romanian border police at Henri Coandă International Airport before departing to the United States via London. According to Kanter and Romanian officials, the Turkish Embassy in Bucharest formally notified Romanian authorities that Kanter's passport was no longer valid. While the embassy did not physically seize the passport, its notification to the Romanian foreign ministry triggered the enforcement by Romanian police.
35. Speaking to his followers on Twitter, Enes Kanter said his passport had been "cancelled" by the Turkish embassy and that he had been held for hours in the Bucharest airport. His release later the same day was secured through the intervention of the NBA organization and the widespread attention of international media, underscoring the importance of external pressure in countering politically motivated actions. Speaking to local media, Romania's then-Foreign Minister Teodor Meleșcanu stated that the country had no choice in the detention of Enes Kanter Freedom at the airport, saying Romania could not "proceed otherwise."[12]

[11] Middle East Eye, Turkish teacher allegedly kidnapped in Mongolia freed after flight grounded, July 28, 2018
[12] CBC, Romanian minister defends keeping Thunder's Enes Kanter at airport, May 21, 2017