

Turkey's Women and LGBTI organizations are excluded from Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

The Turkish government cannot prevent violence against women with government-organized “non-governmental” organizations

The process of the monitoring and implementation of the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, known as the Istanbul Convention is off to a bad start. At a meeting on Monday, December 22, 2014, Turkey's Ministry of Family and Social Policy decided on the three NGOs whose representatives will participate in the nine-person committee that will be responsible for designating Turkey's nominees for the independent body of experts that will monitor the implementation of the Istanbul Convention (GREVIO).

Known for their close ties to the Justice and Development Party (JDP) government, these three NGOs (KADEM, AKDER and KASAD-D) were “selected” after an overwhelming majority of the women's and LGBTI organizations in attendance walked out of the meeting in protest of the Ministry, which ignored their objections and suggestions regarding procedure leading up to, and then also at the beginning of the meeting.

The Istanbul Convention, which Turkey was first to sign without any reservations – thanks to the efforts of the independent women’s organizations – came into effect on August 1, 2014. The Convention explicitly states that violence against women results from the inequality between women and men. It is the most current and comprehensive document that aims to eliminate gender-based violence. And yet, there are media reports that Ayşe Nur İslam, the very Minister of Family and Social Policy, initiated efforts to withdraw Turkey’s signature to the Convention.

Women's organizations were involved in the process before the Ministry

The Istanbul Convention requires the establishment of a group of experts (GREVIO) who will work under the European Council to assess and improve the implementation of the Convention. For months now, women's and LGBTI organizations have been monitoring the implementation of the Convention, including the GREVIO candidate selection process. Eighty-seven independent organizations in Turkey that have direct experience working on gender-based violence, believe in equality between women and men, and closely follow the local, national and international policies on violence have formed the Istanbul Convention Monitoring Platform – Turkey. The Platform wrote to the Ministry of Family and Social Policy with its recommendations regarding the necessary steps to be taken towards implementation of the Convention, its demand that the Platform be included as a primary party in the meetings that will take place to determine Turkey's GREVIO candidates, the qualifications that GREVIO candidates should have, and the names of candidates who carry these qualifications.

The Ministry of Family and Social Policy, did not reply to any of these written petitions and asked for “civil society's opinions” by December 15, 2014 through a note titled “Designation of GREVIO candidates,” which the Ministry published only on its website. However, on December 17, merely two days after the deadline set for the opinions, the Ministry announced its top-down method for the selection of GREVIO candidates. This method that the Ministry imposed without any legitimate reason was to form a committee of nine people consisting of

one representatives from each of the following: Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) Committee on Equality of Opportunity between Women and Men, TGNA Human Rights Inquiry Committee, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Ministry of Family and Social Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Justice. Allotting room for a total of three representatives from three civil society organizations was clearly aimed to turn the NGOs into an ineffective minority *vis a vis* government representatives from the very beginning.

The İstanbul Convention Monitoring Platform – Turkey sent its written opinions and suggestions regarding this method on December 19th, but the Ministry did not take these into consideration. The information that the Ministry would organize a meeting regarding the GREVIO process on December 22nd was conveyed to some of the organizations from the Platform just a day and a half before the meeting. And this time, the Ministry put many bureaucratic obstacles in front of the organizations such as requiring authorization documents with the organization’s stamp and its president's signature (in ink), asking for tax and registration numbers, and demanding that representatives bring their identity cards and the originals of these documents to the meeting. The Ministry used various excuses to try to prevent the participation of Platform members at this meeting even though it had been notified of their participation. In spite of these obstacles, 33 member organizations of the Platform – from İstanbul, Ankara, Muş, Antalya, Adana, Adıyaman, Mersin, Bursa, Edirne, and Antep – traveled to Ankara. Rejecting bureaucratic impositions, these members of the Platform argued that they were primary parties to this process, and succeeded in getting into the meeting.

We do not accept this antidemocratic method!

Even though the Platform members clearly stated, in this rushed meeting, that the Ministry is violating the rules of the Convention regarding civil society participation with this imposed antidemocratic method, that the primary parties to this process should be the organizations that have for years worked on violence, that there should not be an election in this meeting, if there was, it would not be legitimate, and that a new transparent and participatory method should be determined, none of their criticisms were taken into consideration. The Ministry insisted on a vote to choose the three NGOs, asked for stamps and organizational documents of legal entity for voting in the election, and the Ministry officials said out loud that only associations and foundations (with registration numbers, stamps, etc.) would be considered civil society and be allowed to vote. At that point, Platform members left the meeting.

Government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) were elected

After the Platform members left the meeting, we learned that the approximately 25 people who remained in the room contributed to this fraudulent process and “elected” three GONGOs – Women and Democracy Association (KADEM) and Women Health Workers Association for Solidarity (KASAD-D), and The Association for Women’s Rights Against Discrimination (AKDER). It is clear that the government has made its choice on these “elected” organizations long ago. This process is not legitimate. It cannot be accepted that the monitoring of an international convention on violence against women be left to such a committee where state officials form a majority and “civil society” representation is limited to GONGOs.

It was stated that the December 22nd meeting was convened to elect the three NGOs which would be on this committee. However, before the official deadline for receiving opinions was reached, the Turkish Family Platform (TÜRAP), consisting of NGOs that are known for their close relations with the government, distributed (through social media) calls to attend the

meeting giving away that the designation of candidates would be made “through a committee consisting mostly of state officials.” This is indicative of with whom the government worked in this process, and proof that the process of soliciting opinions from civil society was only for show. When we take into consideration that TÜRAP has many members such as the Istanbul Conquerors Scouting Association and HAPKİDO Federation, which do not have knowledge of or experience preventing and combating violence against women, it is evident that the opinion receiving process was run in a nontransparent manner, in violation of the purpose and content of the Convention.

This election is null and void!

The selected “NGO”s the Ministry collaborates with are groups who have mobilized to prevent (!) the Convention's provisions for the prevention of violence against women from damaging the “structure of the family” and its prohibition against discrimination against LGBTI individuals from damaging “society's structure.” This new “committee” established under the Ministry is a committee formed to exclude the women’s and LGBTI organizations from the Istanbul Convention process, distort the content of the Convention and prevent its implementation.

That Turkey has already violated the Convention is proof that we will face new infringements in the implementation of the Convention. The Istanbul Convention is a success of women and cannot be implemented according to the arbitrary decisions of the current government. We will not tolerate actions contrary to the purpose and content of the Convention, and as primary parties to it, we will continue to struggle for the implementation of the Convention. We hereby announce that we will carry our grievance to all related national and international mechanisms, including the Council of Europe, with our message that the prevention of the participation of independent women’s and LGBTI organizations from the process is not only a violation of the Istanbul Convention, but also of the requirements of transparency and equal participation as laid out in the Council of Europe's Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision Making Process.

Istanbul Convention Monitoring Platform - Turkey

23 December 2014 (English text on December 29, 2014)

Members of Istanbul Convention Monitoring Platform - Turkey

1. Adana Women’s Solidarity Centre - Adana Kadın Dayanışma Merkezi (AKDAM)
2. Adıyaman Association of Women and Life - Adıyaman Kadın Yaşam Derneği (AKAYDER)
3. Adıyaman Association for the Research and Analysis of Women’s Issues - Adıyaman Kadın Sorunlarını Araştırma ve Çözüm Derneği (AKSAÇ)
4. Adıyaman Young Women Entrepreneurs and Employment Association - Adıyaman Genç Kuşak Girişimci Kadınlar ve İstihdam Derneği
5. Adıyaman Anatolia Businesswomen’s Association - Adıyaman Anadolu İş Kadınları Derneği
6. Amargi İzmir
7. Antalya Women’s Counseling and Solidarity Association - Antalya Kadın Danışma Merkezi ve Dayanışma Derneği
8. Ankara Feminist Collective (AFK) - Ankara Feminist Kolektif

9. European Women's Lobby – Turkey - Avrupa Kadın Lobisi – Türkiye Koordinasyonu (AKL – Türkiye)
10. Ayvalik Independent Women's Initiative – Ayvalık Bağımsız Kadın Girişimi
11. Independent Women's Association – Mersin - Bağımsız Kadın Derneği-Mersin
12. Buca Evka -1 Women, Culture and Solidarity Association – Buca Evka –1 Kadın Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği (BEKEV)
13. Mor Salkım Women's Solidarity Association - Mor Salkım Kadın Dayanışma Derneği
14. Ceren Women's Association - Ceren Kadın Derneği
15. Association for Gender Equality Watch - Cinsiyet Eşitliği İzleme Derneği (CEİD)
16. Çanakkale Association for the Utilization of Women's Handicrafts - Çanakkale Kadın El Emeğini Değerlendirme Derneği (ELDER)
17. Edirne Women's Counseling Centre Association - Edirne Kadın Merkezi Danışma Derneği
18. Association for Women with Disabilities- Engelli Kadın Derneği
19. Ergani Selis Women's Association - Ergani Selis Kadın Derneği
20. EŞİTİZ – Equality Monitoring Women's Group - EŞİTİZ - Eşitlik İzleme Kadın Grubu
21. Equal Life Association - Eşit Yaşam Derneği
22. Working Group on Woman Home-Based Workers - Ev Eksenli Çalışan Kadınlar Grubu
23. Housewives Association - Ev Hanımları Derneği (EVKAD)
24. Femin & Art International Women Artists Association - Femin & Art Uluslararası Kadın Sanatçılar Derneği (10 Branches)
25. Filmmor Women's Cooperative - Filmmor Kadın Kooperatifi
26. Rainbow Women's Association - Gökkuşluğu Kadın Derneği
27. Rightfull Women Platform - Haklı Kadın Platformu
28. İstanbul Feminist Collective (İFK) – İstanbul Feminist Kolektif
29. Istanbul Women Organizations Union – İstanbul Kadın Kuruluşları Birliği
30. İstanbul LGBTT Solidarity Association - İstanbul LGBTT Dayanışma Derneği
31. İzmir Independent Women's Initiative - İzmir Bağımsız Kadın İnişiyatifi
32. İzmir Bar Association Centre for Women's Rights and Law Research - İzmir Barosu Kadın Hakları ve Hukuk Araştırmaları Merkezi
33. İzmir Çiğli Evka 2 Women's Cultural Association - İzmir Çiğli Evka 2 Kadın Kültür Derneği (ÇEKEV)
34. İzmir Feminist Collective (İzFK) - İzmir Feminist Kolektif
35. İzmir Women's Solidarity Association - İzmir Kadın Dayanışma Derneği
36. Platform for Urgent Action Against Femicide - Kadın Cinayetlerine Karşı Acil Önlem Platformu
37. Women's Studies Association - Kadın Çalışmaları Derneği
38. Women's Education and Labor Association - Kadın Eğitim ve İstihdam Derneği
39. Social Equality with Women and Men Association - Kadın Erkek Birlikte Sosyal Eşitlik Derneği (KEBSED)
40. Women for Women's Human Rights – New Ways (WWHR) - Kadının İnsan Hakları -Yeni Çözümler Derneği (KİH-YÇ)

41. Women's Legal Aid Centre - Kadınlara Hukuki Destek Merkezi (KAHDEM)
42. Foundation for Women's Solidarity – Kadın Dayanışma Vakfı
43. Women's Solidarity Foundation - Kadınlarla Dayanışma Vakfı (KADAV)
44. Women's Labor and Employment Initiative - Kadın Emeği İstihdamı Girişimi (KEİG)
45. Women Writers Association – Kadın Yazarlar Derneği
46. Black Sea Women's Solidarity Association - Karadeniz Kadın Dayanışma Derneği (KarKad-Der)
47. Karya Women's Association – Karya Kadın Derneği
48. The Association for the Support of Women Candidates - Kadın Adayları Destekleme Derneği (KA-DER) (Headquarters and Representatives)
49. The Association for the Support of Women Candidates – Ankara branch – Kadın Adayları Destekleme Derneği Ankara Şubesi (KA-DER Ankara Branch)
50. Gender Equality Association - Kadın Erkek Eşitliği Derneği - KAZETEDER
51. Women's Centre Foundation - Kadın Merkezi Vakfı (KAMER) (23 Branches)
52. Foundation for Women's Solidarity - Kadın Dayanışma Vakfı
53. Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Research and Solidarity Association – Kaos Gey ve Lezbiyen Kültürel Araştırmalar ve Dayanışma Derneği (KaosGL)
54. Cappadocia Women's Solidarity Association - Kapadokya Kadın Dayanışma Derneği
55. KAZETE – Independent Women's Newspaper - Bağımsız Kadın Gazetesi
56. Red Pepper Association - Kırmızı Biber Derneği
57. Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association - Kırmızı Şemsiye Cinsel Sağlık ve İnsan Hakları Derneği
58. Lambdaİstanbul LGBTI Solidarity Association - Lambdaİstanbul LGBTİ Dayanışma Derneği
59. Mavigöl Women's Association - Mavigöl Kadın Derneği
60. Media Watch Group - Medya İzleme Grubu (MEDİZ)
61. Mersin 7 Colours LGBT – 7 Renk LGBT
62. Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation - Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı
63. Purple Hand Eskişehir LGBT - MorEl Eskişehir LGBT
64. Muş Women's Roof Association– Muş Kadın Çatısı Derneği
65. Muş Women's Association – Muş Kadın Derneği (MUKADDER)
66. Ordu Association for Empowering Women – Ordu Kadını Güçlendirme Derneği
67. Pink Life LGBTTT Solidarity Association - Pembe Hayat LGBTTT Dayanışma Derneği
68. Petrol-İş Trade Union Women's Magazine - Petrol-İş Sendikası Kadın Dergisi
69. Selis Women's Association – Selis Kadın Derneği
70. İzmir Black Pink Triangle Association - Siyah Pembe Üçgen İzmir Derneği
71. Association for the Study of Social Policies, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation - Sosyal Politikalar Cinsiyet Kimliği ve Cinsel Yönelim Çalışmaları Derneği (SPoD LGBTİ)
72. The Socialist Feminist Collective (SFK) – Sosyalist Feminist Kolektif
73. The Socialist Women's Assembly – Sosyalist Kadın Meclisi (SKM)

74. Trabzon Association for Women's Advancement and Communication – Trabzon Kadın Gelişim ve İletişim Derneği
75. Transsexual Counseling Centre - Trans Danışma Merkezi (T-DER)
76. Turkish Mothers Association Trabzon Branch - Türk Anneler Derneği Trabzon Şubesi
77. Turkish Women's Union - Türk Kadınlar Birliği
78. Turkish University Graduate Women's Association - Türk Üniversiteli Kadınlar Derneği (TÜKD)
79. Turkish Medical Association Women Physicians Branch - Türk Tabipler Birliği Kadın Hekimler Kolu
80. Federation of Women's Associations of Turkey - Türkiye Kadın Dernekleri Federasyonu
81. Flying Broom Women Communication and Research Association - Uçan Süpürge Kadın İletişim ve Araştırma Derneği
82. Urfa Living Space Women's Solidarity Association – Urfa Yaşamevi Kadın Dayanışma Derneği
83. Life Cooperative for Women, Environment, Culture, and Management/Operation - Yaşam Kadın Çevre Kültür ve İşletme Kooperatifi (YAKA-KOOP)
84. Life Women's Centre Association - Yaşam Kadın Merkezi Derneği
85. Van Women's Association – Van Kadın Derneği (VAKAD)
86. Van Saray District Association for the Modernisation, Preservation and Strengthening of Women, Children and Family Relations– İlçesi Kadın Çocuk ve Aile İlişkilerini Geliştirme Modernleştirme Koruma ve Güçlendirme Derneği
87. WINPEACE – Women's Initiative for Peace between Greece and Turkey- Türkiye Yunanistan Kadınları Barış Girişimi