

2 May 2011, Geneva

*Mr. Chairperson and honorable members of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,*

I, Reyhan Yalçındağ, on behalf of the Kurdish Women's Movement in Turkey and of Roj Women Association, welcome this initial review of Turkey under ESCR Convention. While Zozan has highlighted the discrimination that women in Turkey face in their enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, I would like to emphasize the further discrimination endured by Kurdish women and women from the minorities in Turkey, due to geographical and ethnic factors, in addition to gender factors.

The Turkish Constitution does not recognize different nations, ethnic and religious minorities except Turks and Sunni Moslems. Kurds are not deemed an national ethnicity despite being 25% of the population in Turkey with a distinct language and culture. Speaking Kurdish is forbidden in public spaces. For example, the Turkish government states that instead of "Kurdish women" they will be referred as "women in underdeveloped regions of Turkey".

Kurdish women suffer because of their ethnicity and gender, as well as a consequence of an armed-struggle in predominantly Kurdish regions of East and South-East since 1980's. During these 30 years, including 25 of an enforced Emergency Law, approx. 4000 villages were destroyed and forcefully evacuated by security forces. Around 5,000 Kurdish people disappeared under custody or were killed by extrajudicial killings by State agencies. There are 114 mass graves found uptil now.

Conflict resulted in forced migration to urban centers turning Kurdish women's lives upside down. Kurdish women speak Kurdish and don't speak Turkish. As a result, they are extremely alienated and isolated when resettled and live in poverty and destitution. More recently, the Turkish government continues to target those who work for the recognition of the rights of Kurds. Various strategies are now being used including judiciary to criminalize activists and human rights' defenders. Since 14 April 2009 around 2,000 Kurdish politicians, mayors, elected members of municipality councils, members of Democratic Women Movement and human rights defenders are in prison following an operations named by the State as "*KCK operation*".

The armed conflict has caused social, economical, psychological losses on women. A study conducted in 2007 found at least 80% of Kurdish women suffering mental health. There is a high rate of suicide and attempted suicide among women. Rape and sexual harassment under custody, widespread abuses of human rights, disease and sudden losses among other factors all contribute to this phenomenon. There is an unequal distribution of wealth and resources between West and East Turkey which further discriminates Kurdish women:

**1. There is no education in mother languages other than Turkish.** Thus, Kurdish girls who cannot speak Turkish face difficulties because they encounter Turkish for the first time in their lives at school, at the age of 5. The rate of illiteracy among women in Diyarbakir, the biggest Kurdish province, is of 56%. Similarly, legal literacy on women's rights is provided only in Turkish and there is a notable lack of these services (Community Centres) in the region. The lack of provision of health services in their mother tongue causes violations of rights for women.

**2. The female labour force participation rate is 6% for Kurdish women** much lower than the 25% national average. This can be attributed to the unequal access to education for

Kurdish women. The ability to speak Turkish as a requirement to get work. Kurdish women therefore remain in rural areas working in unpaid household work and agriculture. While attempts have been made to address **low employment** among Kurdish women by offering vocational training in traditionally female skills such as knitting, sewing, cloth dyeing, toy-making and felt processing, these prove to be less marketable, especially in urban settings. Additionally, women from rural settings are often unable to visit these centres due to long distances, high volume of domestic work and patriarchal social norms that restrict women's mobility.

**3. In the region, one out of every two Kurdish women is victim of violence much higher than the 39% national average.** Every day at least a few women is killed just because they want to divorce due to domestic violence. The prosecutors must not send women to their homes without any protection mechanisms who complain against their husbands or ex-husbands. Additionally, violence by security forces against politically active women targets those whose activism is related to taboo issues such as Kurdish struggle for democratic self-determination. 1,400 applications of women victims of sexual abuse while in custody have been made within the last 10 years, but it is estimated that only 10% of victims of this type of abuse report it.

**4. In the region infant and maternal mortality rates** are higher than the national average and where the fertility rate is almost double of that of Turkey's.

*We kindly request the Committee to take note of the following recommendations:*

1. As the armed conflict situation in South East Turkey constitutes a root cause of many violations of women human rights, to solve the Kurdish question will have a positive effect on the situation of women. A new, democratic and civil Constitution can be the first step for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question.
2. The crimes and violations during armed conflict situation since 30 years must be researched and those responsible prosecuted.
3. State-sponsored programs are needed to train translators and counselors with gender perspective for functioning in social services, court houses, hospitals and clinics in Eastern and Southeastern Turkey.
4. Legal literacy on women's rights must be provided in languages other than Turkish (such as Kurdish and Arabic).
5. Rehabilitation centers for women who continue to have psychological problems due to the armed-struggle and higher violence levels in the region must be established and counseling provided in Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic.
6. Data must be collected on the multiple instances of discrimination that women whose native language is not Turkish face in accessing education and health services.
7. Education in mother tongue must be respected by the Constitution.
8. Effective remedies including safe shelter, protection to women in order to stop women killings by male members of the family.
9. Effective measures must be conducted to stop "honor killings".
10. In general, existing programs on social security towards reduction of social risk and poverty should be harmonized and revised responding to the needs of Kurdish women.
11. Kurdish women require enhanced access to rehabilitation services due to political instability, an on-going armed struggle and lower education levels in the region.

I thank the Committee for their kind attention.