

## ASSAULT ON EDUCATION in Turkey and Abroad

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present report examines the systematic legislative, administrative, and other efforts by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) since the beginning of its rule, in particular since 2011 and the aftermath of the July 15, 2016 coup attempt – to permanently Islamize Turkey’s education system.

İmam-Hatip schools, crucial in their role to further the AKP’s political Islam agenda as a breeding ground for radical elements, continue to receive extensive political and material support, including through unlawful seizure (theft) of thousands of closed private educational institutions and land. Despite this aid, these schools still perform extremely poorly in all state tests.

The mushrooming of İmam-Hatip schools, the current rise in homegrown radicalization – along with the surge in the number of terrorist attacks and victims caused by terrorism – show that Turkey’s social fabric is undergoing a very harmful change. It’s possible irreversible damage has already been inflicted to the traditional mainstream understanding of Islam in the country.

The present report further provides an analysis of efforts, begun in 2004, to eradicate the Gülen movement - a renowned movement that combats extremism and radicalization by promoting quality secular education, both nationally and globally. The Gülen movement represented a major inconvenience to the ruling AKP’s objectives on education, and as such, was targeted from the early days of AKP rule.

The December 2013 corruption scandal and the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016 were followed by an unprecedented purge targeting citizens from all walks of life, in particular the alleged sympathizers of the Gülen movement in the education system, both in Turkey and abroad. The large-scale assault against the movement started with the introduction of a bill in 2013 to close preparatory schools, aiming to shut down what was widely perceived to be a “major source of revenue for the movement,” and to simultaneously increase AKP influence in the education system.

The report further addresses the devastating effect the measures enacted under the state of emergency have had on primary, secondary, and higher education, in particular on dedicated educators across the country, regardless of their political stances or other convictions. Overnight, these educators became a suspected and oppressed class.

**And the government's assault on education is still expanding.**

By the end of January 2017, the unprecedented assault on education has seen 6,986 academics purged from their positions, along with 41,667 teachers and employees of the Ministry of Education. Tens of thousands of educators across the country have been detained and arrested on very serious charges, with no evidence of wrongdoing provided. The assault on the principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression have already dismantled much of the existing structure of Turkish education. Today, the AKP is finalizing its process of asserting total control over Turkey's educational institutions.

Finally, the report analyzes the ongoing repression of teachers and the assault on Gülen movement inspired schools abroad. Well-known for their excellence in education, the schools constitute one of the largest and strongest counters to radical Islamic trends around the world.

The report concludes that efforts by the Turkish government, *inter alia*, through its recently established radical subsidiary (the Maarif foundation) to take over Gülen movement inspired schools aims at using them as a springboard in further contributing to youth radicalization and extremism in sovereign countries.

Taking into consideration the unprecedented assault on education, both in Turkey and abroad, the report further concludes that the Islamic transformation of the education system is likely to have long-term implications for Turkey and on the political choices it will make. The rise of radicalization will inevitably have its own cost and long-term negative social and political repercussions in Turkey, the volatile larger Middle East, and also countries where the Maarif foundation would be successful in establishing itself.

**In the face of the unprecedented attack on education, key recommendations to the Turkish authorities include the following:**

1. Immediate release of all academics, teachers, unionists, students, activists, and others who have been detained and imprisoned on unlawful and illegal grounds.
2. Immediate reinstatement to their positions of all academics, teachers, and other personnel, and an end to the repression of teachers, academics, and other education personnel in the country and abroad.
3. Immediate reversal of all legal, administrative, and practical measures, as well as all policies and actions that are part of the assault on education, both in Turkey and abroad.

**Key recommendations to the international community include:**

4. Strongly urge Turkish authorities to end the assault on education, both in the country and abroad.
5. Strongly urge Turkish authorities to end the state of emergency and fully abide by
6. Turkey's obligations under international law and its own domestic legislation.
7. Prevent, in accordance with applicable international human rights law, any forcible return of Turkish teachers or academics at extreme risk to Turkey, or any other place where they face torture, ill-treatment, or a real risk to their lives.

**Scope and focus of the report**

The present report was drafted by the Journalists and Writers Foundation over a 3-month period in an effort to document the unprecedented attack by the Turkish government on education - coinciding with an increasing and widespread assault on education, teachers, academics, and other staff by the government, both in Turkey and abroad.

The report analyzes the current situation of education in Turkey and places it in a logical and consequent timeline with the view of understanding the objectives of the assault through the “bigger picture” and, further, the perils associated with the continuing radicalization of youth in Turkey.

The report focuses in particular on the extremely difficult situation faced by teachers, academics, students, and other personnel in Turkey and abroad, including arrests, abductions, detentions, threats, dismissals, and cancellation of passports.

The Journalists and Writers Foundation is most grateful to all those contributing to the report, in particular all those academics and teachers who, at great personal risk in Turkey and other countries, facilitated the drafting of the report.

The Journalists and Writers Foundation dedicates the present report to tens of thousands of devoted Turkish teachers and academics who currently face unprecedented persecution in Turkey and around the world - some of them unfortunately having already paid a heavy price for their commitment to principles and values.

**They will not be forgotten!**

## **Report's methodology and structure**

The research methodology consisted of the following specific components:

1. Analysis of legislation, state reports, and information obtained through monitoring open sources (including pro-government media and press releases by NGOs and international organizations).
2. Communications with victims and their relatives, school principals, teachers, and academics.
3. Analysis of the collected data, reports, statements, observations and other evidence.

In many cases described in the report the Journalists and Writers Foundation decided not to reveal the identity of the victims or the sources in order to protect individuals against eventual reprisals.