

Capacity Building for the Effective Participation of Civil Society towards the Solution of the Kurdish Issue

NGO Interviews Report



Truth, Justice and Memory Studies

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Introduction:

Since the first half of 1980s, Turkey has been in a state of armed conflict affecting not only its east and southeast regions but also the entire country, and triggering political, social, economic and cultural ramifications. This state of armed conflict and the Kurdish issue, shaped by dynamics more complex than in the preceding period, clearly become manifest both in the region and in other metropolises as one of the most important issues in Turkey. The issue not only affects the political arena in the narrow sense, but also leads to significant transformations in the social arena as it continues to be shaped by the daily experiences of various social groups.

The primary aim of the project “*Capacity Building for the Effective Participation of Civil Society towards the Solution of the Kurdish Issue*” is to conduct a systematic study of civil initiatives in Turkey that are concerned with the social manifestations of the Kurdish issue, and that thereby aim to contribute to the establishment of peace. The second aim of the project is to create an online resource for nongovernmental organizations by translating into Turkish the related articles detailing methods for confronting the past, uncovering truth and reinstating justice that have been employed by societies with post-conflict experiences around the world. Another objective for exploring cases from around the world is to make a comparative evaluation of the initiatives and works in Turkey, in an effort to contribute to the identification of new strategies that can be utilized in the future.

Two observations about Turkey and the Kurdish issue constitute the starting point of this project. The first observation, which has gradually been voiced more and more both by political actors and various observers as well as academicians and journalists, is in regards to the altering dimensions and forms the Kurdish issue has assumed in the recent period. We can summarize these shifts as follows: first, today, the general population recognizes the reality of the Kurdish issue, whereas formerly it was called the “eastern problem” and was portrayed with attributes such as underdevelopment, tradition, and having a feudal structure. Secondly, politics geared towards the denial of Kurds’ existence are, relatively speaking, being abandoned and replaced with politics of exclusion and discrimination. Thirdly, the consequences of the state’s politics of violence (aspects of which include forced migration, unsolved murders by unidentified perpetrators, creation of paramilitary groups, mass arrests,

tortures, deaths, etc.) executed throughout the 1990s are affecting the economic, cultural and social lives of all communities in Turkey and primarily the Kurdish communities. And finally, the social space is being opened in which certain steps towards the solution of the issue can occur.

Along with its changing dimension and form, ways of addressing the Kurdish issue's objectives, politics, needs and efforts in the civil arena are also changing. For example, there is an increase in projects placed inside the social arena, such as efforts pertaining to women, children, the poor and social trauma. Similarly, initiatives towards the establishment of truth commissions and the reinstatement of social justice are now also on the agenda. In our opinion, understanding this change through a holistic approach, identifying the problem areas, seeking collaborations to identify new strategies and thereby enabling the society's participation in the process of peace building are most essential for the establishment of a permanent state of peace.

Another important point that we observed prior to the launch of our project was that the general public of Turkey views the Kurdish issue as a very specific and unique issue. Despite the small number of books translated to Turkish about ethnic conflicts, such as that of the Bask, Ireland's problems and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa, until recently there have been little such comparative efforts in Turkey. Neither the Kurdish or the Turkish public, nor the actors and institutions that conduct civil and political work on the Kurdish issue have been able to sufficiently benefit from the theoretical and practical information about the conflicts, rehabilitation processes and methods employed across the world. Even though various international conferences and meetings facilitate exchange, we believe that the establishment of academic and relational sources that enable a permanent partnership is one of the most important requisites for this period.

In the scope of this project and based on the two aforementioned points of departure, in-depth interviews were conducted with the objective of understanding the kinds of work presently being undertaken in Turkey regarding the social manifestations of the Kurdish issue. Furthermore, based on the needs and demands of non-governmental organizations in Turkey and drawing from similar cases around the world, we produced a compilation of significant international resources on concepts such as conflict resolution, confronting the past, the reinstatement of justice and peace building, as well as various complementary methods such as prosecution, reparation programs and constitutional reform. We translated certain articles into

Turkish and shared these on our website to provide a resource for NGOs. Even though it is not possible to absolutely divide the political and the social problem areas, in light of the aforementioned observations this project has focused only on the works geared towards the social sphere. Therefore, before moving on to the results, it will be useful to give a conceptual description of what we refer to as the social sphere.

Scope of the Project:

The injustices experienced by and the depredation of especially the Kurdish community but also across all communities of Turkey come in a wide variety. We broadly named these as the social manifestations of the Kurdish issue, and grouped them under three headings: 1. Representation, 2. Confrontation and Reparation, 3. Discrimination.

Even though it is generally an expression used in the political sphere, we employ the concept of *representation* in its broadest sense, meaning we seek to facilitate the social recognition of the Kurds' expression of themselves, and the problems and unjust treatment they have faced. We believe that the most significant obstacle hindering peace is the broad issue of social visibility working against the Kurds in realms including justice, the labor market, state institutions, public/civil space, institutions of education and the media. While the social demands of the Kurdish population are being obscured, the Kurds are still portrayed as "underdeveloped," "traditional," "patriarchal," "ignorant" and "separatist". This knowledge continues to be reproduced via institutions in fields of education, law, administration, labor, health and so on. Such representations both fuel social discrimination and silence demands for establishment of information, confrontation and reparation programs addressing the unjust treatment of the Kurdish people. As often voiced by civil initiatives, the diversification and pluralism of Kurdish representations in the social sphere is most essential for social empowerment in the present situation.

Another issue shaping the social sphere is the injustice and damages caused by state violence displayed in the extreme as mass killings, unsolved murders by unidentified perpetrators, torture, and razed villages. Those affected by this violence are not only the victims themselves but also those in their immediate circles. Furthermore, this violence has transformed all social relations by infiltrating every field of daily life. The state politics that have been systematically executed throughout the 30-year war are at the very root of numerous problems that have set the agenda in recent years, problems which have been addressed separately as if

they were unrelated issues, such as “child victims of TMK (Struggle Against Terror Law),” “deaths of shipyard workers,” “poverty,” “seasonal workers” and “violence against women.” Adopting a holistic perspective of these problems and facilitating *social confrontation* and developing *reparation programs* will contribute to the realization of justice as well as the advancement of dialogue among communities.

The third problem area is the *discrimination experienced in daily life*, which has been growing deeper and more prevalent over the recent periods. The increasing number of lynching attempts over the past few years and armed or verbal racist attacks against Kurds in various public spaces ranging from university campuses to neighborhoods, street markets to entertainment venues, are the most visible proof of the escalating prevalence of daily discrimination and violence. Yet these are only the tip of the iceberg. Kurds are being stigmatized and isolated both by the state and different communities on a wide spectrum that ranges from denying housing and employment to Kurds, to making arrests based on place of birth and traffic controls based on license plates. Moreover, as mentioned above, this type of discrimination stands out as an administrative strategy aiming to replace the politics of denying the Kurdish identity. In our opinion, work to be conducted in this field will also play an important role both in the institution of justice and the solution of social problems.

Methodology

The first phase of the project seeks to examine how, in course of their past and current works, the nongovernmental organizations, human rights activists and local initiatives in Turkey have addressed the social dimension of the Kurdish issue as it is grouped under our aforementioned three headings. As the project team, we worked together with the advisory board to identify the organizations to be interviewed, the questions to be asked and the framework of the questions during the interviews. We grouped our questions under the following main headings:

- The kind of work the NGO is carrying out, and the methods they use;
- The people with whom they cooperate, and their target audiences and objectives;
- Their unsustainable or unrealizable projects, and the institutional and structural obstacles and deficiencies they faced;

- The kinds of changes that have taken place over time in their projects, and the reasons for these changes;
- Their institutional and logistical needs;
- Their future projects and goals.

The observations and findings shared in the following pages are attained from the one-time interviews conducted over the course of a single month with thirty organizations in Istanbul and Diyarbakır that host the highest number of NGOs. However, we of course do not claim that the results we have drawn from these interviews represent Turkey or the region completely. Our most important criterion in identifying the non-governmental organizations to be interviewed was their previous experience of working with social manifestations of the Kurdish issue. We paid special care to include NGOs in our list that work on issues pertaining to gender, children, poverty and forced migration. We also interviewed institutions that actively advocate against discrimination and those that were founded in order to contribute to the process of confronting the past. The names of institutions and individuals we have interviewed respectively in Diyarbakır and Istanbul are as follows: Diyarbakır Bar Association (Diyarbakır), Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, TIHV (Diyarbakır), Mesopotamia Association of Assistance and Solidarity for Families with Lost Relatives, MEYA-DER (Diyarbakır), Children Under the Same Roof, ÇAÇA (Diyarbakır), The Association of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People, Mazlum-Der (Diyarbakır), Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Center for Research and Application on Women’s Issues (DIKASUM), Selis Women’s Consultation Center (Diyarbakır), Sarmaşık Association for Sustainable Development to Fight Poverty (Diyarbakır), Diyarbakır Chamber of Commerce and Industry, DTSO (Diyarbakır), Bağlar Municipality Kardelen Women’s Home, Southeast Association of Journalists (Diyarbakır), Doğan News Agency (Diyarbakır), Human Rights Association, IHD (Diyarbakır), Union of Education and Science Laborers, Eğitim-Sen (Diyarbakır). Art for Peace Initiative (Istanbul), Peace Assembly (Istanbul), Social Assistance and Culture Association of Migrant or Displaced People, GÖÇ-DER (Istanbul), Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly, (Istanbul), Human Rights Association, IHD (Istanbul), Legal Aid Office Against Custodial Sexual Harassment and Rape (Istanbul), Foundation for Society and Legal Studies, TOHAV (Istanbul), Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, TIHV (Istanbul), History Foundation of Turkey (Istanbul), 78'ers Initiative (Istanbul), Say No to Racism and

Nationalism Initiative (Istanbul), Global Peace and Justice Coalition (Istanbul), International Hrant Dink Foundation (Istanbul), Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, TESEV (Istanbul) and Oral Çalışlar.

The literature on civil society and democratization served as a conceptual guide for our work. Among the sources we benefited from was the work by Thania Paffenholz and Christoph Spurk. In their work they classify the roles that NGOs play and the tools they apply in peace building processes, and they group the NGOs' roles under seven core functions, namely "protection; monitoring and accountability; advocacy and public communication; socialization and a culture of peace; conflict sensitive social cohesion; intermediation and facilitation; and service delivery."¹ Ayşe Betül Çelik's application of this conceptualization of method/tools on NGOs that deal with the Kurdish issue has also facilitated our work significantly.² In brief, *protection* in the regional context mostly includes the efforts made to protect the civil population in war zones or in cities from the disproportionately powerful state violence. *Monitoring* refers to the act of monitoring the state apparatus' activities in the conflict zone. Though limited, reports from the social sectors concerning human rights violations amongst the social sector itself are also addressed in this category. NGO insistence of the state's responsibility in human rights violations via systems similar to the human rights watch committee and demanding the state to fulfill its burden of accountability is also included under this heading. *Advocacy* is the general term for the NGOs' efforts of communicating to the public and spreading information about the conflict. *Socialization* describes how NGOs work to spread the culture of peace among groups of people. *Social cohesion* encompasses the creation of infrastructure enabling the sectors in conflict to live together as equal citizens within society. The function of *intermediation and facilitation* is to contribute to the development of dialogue at the local or national levels between the group in conflict and the state, or among the people behind the groups in conflict. Finally, the function of *service delivery* refers to the social, medical, legal and financial aids provided by the NGOs to victims during or after periods of conflict.

Activities and Initiatives Targeting the Social Sphere in Diyarbakır

¹Thania Paffenholz and Christoph Spurk, "A Comprehensive Analytical Framework", in *Civil Society and Peacebuilding, A Critical Assessment*, Thania Paffenholz (ed.), (Lynne Rienner: London, 2010), pg. 65- 76.

² Ayşe Betül Çelik, "Turkey: The Kurdish Question and the Coercive State", in *Civil Society and Peacebuilding, A Critical Assessment*, Thania Paffenholz (ed.), (Lynne Rienner: London, 2010), pg. 153- 180.

All the NGOs we interviewed in Diyarbakır were in consensus regarding the urgency and necessity of conducting work that address the social manifestations of the Kurdish issue. Most of these NGOs have already developed such projects and are presently implementing them. Nevertheless, as will be mentioned below, the rule of a constant state of emergency (OHAL), especially in Diyarbakır and across that region, constitutes an important obstacle hindering the diversification of the NGOs work into different fields, their spread and publicity across various sectors of the society, and the development of innovative and creative strategies. *Protection, monitoring, advocacy* and *service* constitute the methods utilized most intensely by the NGOs in Diyarbakır. It can also be stated that a great majority of the civil efforts in Diyarbakır are carried out in the fields of law and education.

In Diyarbakır, NGOs began to form only after 1988. The Diyarbakır İHD and the Diyarbakır Bar Association, both founded in 1988, have undertaken the tasks of monitoring and reporting human rights violations and legal counseling and service delivery since the 1990s and during the most intense period of the war under the official State of Emergency rule. After 2004, the TIHV, followed by the Mazlum-Der Diyarbakır, joined these two organizations.

Many NGO representatives related how diversification in their field of work in the region and the increase in number of NGOs took place in the 2000s. This transformation is experienced simultaneously with the decrease in the intensity of the war during the post-2000 period and the strengthening of local governments in the region. The most striking new fields that have been mentioned are the socio-cultural support and education efforts catering to women and children carried out mostly in coordination with the local governments in the region, the legal trainings for local administrators of all levels and jurists, and the financial support programs for families subjected to forced migration . Methods often employed in these fields are as follows: legal struggle for the establishment of and reparation for violations of the right to life, documentation, reporting, research, medical and social support and training. In other words, these are works that can be assembled under the headings of *protection, monitoring, advocacy* and *service delivery*.

Following the adoption of law number 5233, on the Compensation of Damages caused by post 1987 Terror or Struggle against Terror, which went into effect on January 27, 2004, we have witnessed an escalation of efforts to increase the forced migration victims' awareness of their rights. Again, it is only after 2005 that research on poverty and forced migration were begun.

The top priority areas of social need identified in almost all Diyarbakır interviews can be assembled under the headings of “representation” and “confrontation.” In the course of nearly every interview, before starting to talk about their actual field of work, the NGO representatives complained about the lack of knowledge and/or distortion in western Turkey regarding “the reality of the region” during the 1990s. They pointed out that the information gap between the east and the west, and especially the fact that people are misinformed on recent history, constitute the biggest impediment to peace. This situation of misinformation, they claimed, is an extension and manifestation of the state’s politics of discrimination, denial and refusal to acknowledge the existence of the Kurds throughout the history of the republic. Thus, the actual work of all the NGOs are most always accompanied by the concern of “uncovering the experienced truth” and “rendering it recognizable to the people of Turkey”.

In this sense, one can say that specifically in Diyarbakır there is a dual regional and national objective held by the NGOs in that region, in that their first objective is to carry out reformative and social empowerment projects targeting the aforementioned social problems, and their second objective is to enable the general public of Turkey to recognize the history, experience of oppression, political will and demands of the Kurdish issue’s victims, agents and counterparts.

Below you can find a compilation of the works carried out by the NGOs we have interviewed in Diyarbakır.

NGOs Interviewed in Diyarbakır

Diyarbakır Human Rights Association (İHD)

Being one of the oldest and most established organizations in the region, one can say that in the eyes of a significant part of society the Diyarbakır İHD fulfills the role of a (social and political) counseling center. İHD carries out its activities through commissions and currently has five active commissions: prison, women, children, environmental and urban rights, and NGO development. The İHD Racism and Discrimination Commission was one of the most active commissions of the Istanbul İHD in the 1990s, and has again become active over the past few weeks after having been idle in recent years. It was founded in Diyarbakır on grounds that racism and discrimination constituted a problem area in that region. The rights violations reports, which for the past two years have been relatively more detailed and have

revealed evidence more clearly, continue to be shared with the public every three months. Following a collaborative effort carried out with the Bilgi University Human Rights Law Research Center, İHD's post-1988 records of rights violations, disappeared people, unsolved murders by unidentified perpetrators, and names of people and places have been archived in their original format. One of the upcoming and most significant projects of İHD is the Blood Bank project. The Blood Bank project aims to overcome the problems of identifying those in mass graves and disappeared people caused by the state's Forensic Science Institute's operational tendencies by gathering blood samples from the relatives of disappeared people and unsolved murder victims. In the long term, this project seeks to function as a kind of forensic science institute.

Mazlum-Der

Founded in 2004, Diyarbakır Mazlum-Der is a branch of the human rights organization Mazlum-Der that has 22 branches across Turkey. Mazlum-Der has specialized in on-site establishment of violations of the right to life and instigation of the legal processes. Its most detailed reports to date are the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) report, Mardin Bilge Village report, the prison reports on the Justice Initiative for Children and the Abolishment of State Employed Village Rangers System (Koruculuk). Other important reports prepared by the Mazlum-Der Diyarbakır branch are: the research and investigation report of the violation of the right to life and injury incident that took place in the city of Diyarbakır, Lice district, Ahmet (Goma Ahmet) field; the village fires report in the city of Batman, Hasakeyf district; the report concerning internally displaced peoples; the research and investigation report on Ceylan Önkol; and the research and investigation report of the fire that took place in the Tuzla village of the Kulp district in the city of Diyarbakır. Cases of religious discrimination are also within the organization's field of work. Among the campaigns currently run by Mazlum-Der are the those for the abolishment of the state employed village rangers system (koruculuk), "Our Pledge" (a compulsory oath recited by elementary and secondary school students), and the National Security classes, as well as the signature campaign titled "We Want a Civil Constitution."

Meya-Der

Founded in 2007 by the primary victims of the 30-year war, Meya-Der (Mesopotamia Association of Assistance and Solidarity for Families with Lost Relatives) is the first

organization to work on the subject of disappeared people. Primarily collecting data from the families in order to find the PKK militants and victims of unsolved murders by unidentified perpetrators, Meya-Der has reached 14 thousand families to date. Meya-Der works in coordination with the Bar Association, TIHV and İHD regarding the instigation of legal processes following the detection and the opening of the mass graves. The organization also provides legal coaching for the families. By organizing marches with the photographs of the disappeared persons in order to remember and commemorate them, Meya-Der aims to increase the visibility of the victims in society and empower them. Working with the objective of contributing to social peace, Meya-Der's first project that can be positioned under the category of *social cohesion* was to invite the Solidarity Association of Martyr Families to Diyarbakır on September 1, 2009. However, the re-escalated state of armed conflict and the colonization of martyr families' associations by Turkish nationalism caused this event to remain as the first and last of its kind.

Diyarbakır Bar Association

Besides its capacity as a vocational chamber, the Bar actively partakes in the struggle for the peaceful solution to the Kurdish issue, and along with TIHV and İHD has played a pioneering role in the establishment of and follow-through in cases (through domestic legal processes and the ECHR) concerning human rights violations, disappeared people and unsolved murders by unidentified perpetrators in the region. The Diyarbakır Bar constitutes of five main units: the Division for Women's Affairs, the Division for Children's Affairs, the Division for Land Mines and Migration, the Division for Legal Aid for Torture Victims, the Division for Unsolved Murders by Unidentified Perpetrators and the Division for Prisons. Along with its counseling and support services, the Bar prepares proposals for law reform and also prepares alternative shadow reports countering official ones. Also working in field of *discrimination*, the Bar has objectives such as gathering all resources on women's rights (documents, books, Court of Appeals' decrees, etc.) and enabling all volunteer lawyers to utilize these in order to overcome the problems experienced with law enforcement officers. The "Justice for All" project is one of the most important projects run by the Diyarbakır Bar. This project not only aims to provide legal coaching, but the Bar also plans to distribute "These are your rights" cards, give legal trainings to people ranging from lawyers to elected heads of neighborhoods (*muhtar*), and also to develop people's ability to access lawyers and legal aid by putting out ads on billboards that read, "Lawyers - Free of charge," which will be a first in Turkey.

Eđitim-Sen

Established in the aftermath of the September 12, 1980 military coup that closed down TÖB-
DER (an organization for educators), Eđitim-Sen's Diyarbakır Office is a vocational
organization founded by around 300 members on March 12, 1991.

During the period of war, Eđitim-Sen's 27 members became victims of unsolved murders by
unidentified perpetrators, while hundreds of its members were exiled. Eđitim-Sen's
Diyarbakır Office spearheaded the foundation of the Diyarbakır Democracy Platform and
Regional Democracy Platform, the first of their kind in Turkey. Along with vocational
trainings and conferences specifically for teachers, Diyarbakır Eđitim-Sen has undertaken an
important mission in political and cultural *rights advocacy*, such as the right to education in
one's mother tongue. Another field of Eđitim-Sen's activities is their goal to empower
different sections of society by supporting the use of various group's mother tongues through
story contests in Turkish, Kurdish and Zazaki.

They also struggle against *discrimination* by providing after school trainings to nearly 10,000
students by using the teaching staff of Educational Support Homes and Vocation Homes run
in conjunction with Eđitim-Bir-Sen and with the support of municipalities. The organization
also holds negotiations with the Ministry of National Education to localize the curriculum.
They also have a book project compiling the life stories of education martyrs who were
murdered in the 1990s.

DİKASUM and SELİS

Kardelen Women's House under the Bağlar Municipality, DİKASUM (Diyarbakır
Metropolitan Municipality Center for Research and Action on Women's Issues) and Selis
Women's Counseling Center mainly work on the following: psychological counseling and
support to women and children on health, gender-based violence, legal support and
counseling, referral services to relevant institutions, shelter applications, gender-based
awareness raising programs, programs to combat violence against women, women's human
rights education programs, field research to identify women's problems and devise policies to
overcome them, planning of trainings and all activities in the field of women's rights, and

conducting joint activities with women's organizations and ensuring representation in meetings.

Their ongoing social support projects include the following: laundromats established in three large neighborhoods in Diyarbakır with large migrant populations, summer schools for children in collaboration with the Metropolitan Municipality, establishment of official wedding ceremonies, birth registration of children, issuing and monitoring of health cards for those without social security, assistance with divorce proceedings, and referral to shelters. Kardelen has also founded a Center for Children Working on the Street in collaboration with the Italian Piedmont local government, which aims to rehabilitate and empower the most fragile groups of society that have suffered extensively from the 30-year war by providing them social and psychological support.

ÇAÇA (Association of Children Under the Same Roof)

The ÇAÇA Association, which began its activities in 2001 and was officially registered in 2003, works with children working on the street and child victims of migration, providing social support through art towards the objective of social empowerment and development. It is possible to compare their projects to the Older Sister-Brother Volunteers Program, Art Workshops Program, One to One Activities with Children, and the Child to Child program, all of which aim to develop children's skills (communication, self-expression, problem solving etc) and enable healthy development (self confidence, self-respect, socialization, non-violence, staying in school) under the field of *services*. ÇAÇA also organizes exhibitions, discussions, panels, postering and meetings. Currently, ÇAÇA mainly works in Ben-u Sen and Mazıdağı neighborhoods. Additionally, ÇAÇA is the only NGO we interviewed that works for the rights and visibility of disabled persons.

Sarmaşık Association for Sustainable Development to Fight Poverty

Sarmaşık (Vine) Association is a non-governmental organization established in April 2006 by 32 founding members coming from the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, other NGOs, associations for industrialists and business professionals and vocational chambers in Diyarbakır with the objective of researching and reporting the socioeconomic effects on society of underdeveloped production and forced migration channeled to Diyarbakır for the past 20 years, and implementing projects to improve the conditions of disadvantaged groups (such as the unemployed, women, children, and the disabled). Strengthening social solidarity

among citizens is one of the organization's goals. Sarmaşık is one of the most active NGOs in Diyarbakır with projects such as the following: the Food Bank, which was founded based on the city poverty mapping project the organization undertook in collaboration with Diyarbakır TIHV; the Child Education Support Program (education, socio-cultural, psychological support and vocational training for 110 children); the Women's Health Project; and the year long Family Health Project implemented in collaboration with TAP (Turkish Family Health and Planning) Foundation. Furthermore, Sarmaşık offers a unique operating structure by basing all its projects on a broad, coordinated and collaborative regional NGO network. This regional network and coordinating body strives to present an alternative to the top down, charity oriented social aid approach of the state, government and other religious communities with a "rights-based support" approach to social services.

Activities and Initiatives Targeting the Social Sphere in İstanbul:

İstanbul is obviously the city with the most diverse and active civil society, despite the fact that NGO activity came to a halt around the September 12 military coup era. It is possible to categorize the work of the NGOs we interviewed in İstanbul under three headings. The first heading is those that work nationwide on issues of discrimination, confrontation and representation. Such organizations include the History Foundation, the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly and the Hrant Dink Foundation. The second heading describes groups that have initiatives that strive to build peace movements by using methods of coexistence, mediation and facilitation. These groups include the Art for Peace Initiative, Peace Assembly, and Global Peace and Justice Coalition. Finally, the third category is comprised of organizations that undertake rights-based advocacy, documentation and campaigning, and that provide social, medical and legal assistance to aggrieved parties. Most of these institutions are in close contact or collaboration with institutions or equivalent organizations in Diyarbakır, such as the following: GÖÇ-DER (Social Assistance and Culture Association of Migrant or Displaced People), Human Rights Association Legal Aid Office Against Custodial Sexual Harassment and Rape, TOHAV (Foundation for Society and Legal Studies), TIHV (Human Rights Foundation of Turkey), and the 78'ers Foundation.

Civil Society Organizations Interviewed in İstanbul

History Foundation of Turkey

Operating under the full name of the Economic and Social History Foundation of Turkey between 1991 – 2004, the organization now known as the History Foundation is an initiative founded in September 1991 by intellectuals from various professions and circles, spearheaded by historians and sociologists. The Foundation aims to advance and promote historical awareness in Turkey, to introduce a new and diverse perspective to the society's approach to history, and to preserve Turkey's historical heritage with an unshakable awareness and the extensive participation of various social groups.

The work areas of the History Foundation may be summarized as local history, oral history, cultural heritage, archiving, librarianship, museology and publishing. The Foundation has contributed to increasing awareness of cultural diversity and *coexistence* in Turkey through the Turkey's People Project, Human Landscape of Mardin Project and the "Will you listen to my story?" project, and has documented specific historical truths through oral history. Furthermore, the organization is working against *discrimination* through the history education and textbook project, human rights in school textbooks project (they plan to publish social sciences, history, and history of the revolution textbooks to be used in primary and secondary education), and analyzing existent textbooks from a human rights perspective to develop alternative educational material (textbooks). They stress the importance of collaborating with international organizations and engaging in dialogue with the Ministry of National Education to revise school curricula. The Foundation plans to publish books on the Kurdish people in the republican era and an anthology of Kurdish literature in the near future.

Hrant Dink Foundation

The Hrant Dink Foundation undertakes numerous and multi-pronged activities such as publishing, archive development, summer school organization, and film, music, visual arts, dance and literature festivals with the aim of promoting cultural relations between the societies of Turkey, Armenia and Europe, thereby supporting the democratization process in Turkey and documenting a history free of racism. Furthermore, the foundation also undertakes activities such as collecting articles, photographs and documents on Hrant Dink and giving out an annual award in the name of Hrant Dink. The 2010 Hrant Dink award, which was the second year the prize was given, was awarded to Mehmet Tarhan on behalf of the conscientious objectors movement, and the Spanish judge Baltasar Garzon. The

Foundation's work up until today includes the Adana 1909 Conference (a meeting on Armenian architects of İstanbul and their contributions) and the Cultural Interactions Symposium (a research project on the socioeconomic history of Eastern Anatolia among others). The Films of Conscience project is still ongoing. Two other currently active projects are "The Media Watch and Hate Speech" monitoring project which entails the monitoring of 26 daily national newspapers, and the research and conference series on social life in Anatolia before 1915, supported by the Historical Research Incentive Fund.

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (hCa)

Working independently from political parties, the government and states, the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly aims for the actual realization of peace, human rights, an environmentally friendly economic system, democracy and the supremacy of law as identified by international agreements, and the prevalence of these universal values across the civil society at the grassroots level. The underlying working principle of hCa that aims to improve pluralistic democratic structures and civil society initiatives is their belief that problems can be resolved through mutual understanding and dialogue. hCa's primary areas of work are numerous. Their goals are social peace, the development of civil approaches against conflicts, the strengthening of local democracy and civil society, the supremacy of law, and the European Union integration process.

The Mapping Discrimination in Turkey (<http://ayrimcilikaglari.org>) project, through which the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly aims to provide an overview of racism and torture in Turkey using mapping methodology, is a groundbreaking initiative in this field. As a methodology, mapping is used for rendering visual a certain social phenomenon and any relevant actors and institutions and the web of relations among them. In addition to the above, hCa also conducts projects such as Envisioning Secularism in Everyday Life, the Refugee Advocacy and Support Program, Strategic Mapping of Torture in Turkey, and Promoting Roma Rights in Turkey.

Art for Peace Initiative

Art for Peace is an initiative founded in October 2009 by artists who have come together with the aim of promoting the demand for peace across Turkey, advocating for the unconditional practice of democratic rights, and establishing social dialogue to enable the peaceful solution to problems in the country, and concerning primarily the Kurdish issue. The initiative aims to promote social *dialogue* through concerts, shows, performances, and screenings in different regions of Turkey. Its objectives include bringing cultural events and activities to the Kurdish region and integrating art initiatives from Kurdish cities with artistic activities in Turkey or the Mediterranean Region. The initiative's activities up to date include: a Collection of signatures to support the initiative for peace process in the Kurdish issue (a.k.a. the Kurdish Expansion/Opening), the January 23, 2010 "All of Us II – For Peace For Hrant" event, a Diyarbakır Event organized on March 13-14, 2010, and the 2010 Newroz Kurdish Spring Festival.

Global Peace and Justice Coalition (PJC)

The main aim of the Global Peace and Justice Coalition (PJC) is to build an anti-war movement throughout Turkey, mobilize the unorganized masses in the context of this campaign and to contribute to the global anti-war movement by connecting with the global anti-capitalist and anti-war movements. After 2007, the Kurdish issue has also been added to the PJC's campaign areas. In the context of this last area, meetings and conferences were organized and press releases issued in the framework of the "Silence War, Raise Peace" campaign. Campaigns have also been organized in İstanbul to promote social peace and a culture of *coexistence*. Various meetings have been organized in collaboration with other NGOs working on peace issues and universities in Central and Western Anatolia.

Peace Assembly of Turkey

Founded in 2007, the Peace Assembly of Turkey is an initiative which struggles for the achievement of peace in Turkey. It has organized bodies on the city level. The most distinctive characteristic of the Peace Assembly is the establishment of provincial peace assemblies. At the city level, peace assemblies have been formed in a total of 27 provinces including Diyarbakır, Mardin, Van, Ankara, Bursa, Batman, İstanbul, İzmir, and Samsun. The assemblies are comprised of representatives of unions like KESK and DISK, and are mostly Kurdish citizens who are members of various leftist parties, and who are lawyers, writers, journalists, artists and peace activists. The Peace Assembly of Turkey also organizes

campaigns, meetings, press statements and conferences on democratization of the constitution and the Kurdish issue.

Social Assistance and Culture Association of Migrant or Displaced People (Göç-Der)

Göç-Der works directly with victims of forced migration and has a strong organic connection to the Kurdish region, and was founded initially in Mersin in 2004 (a city that has experienced intense forced migration), and later a second branch was opened in Istanbul in 2007.

Göç-Der employs methods such as advocacy and lobbying, awareness raising, mobilization, organization of campaigns, research, networking, legal aid programs, trainings, meetings, press statements, and until recently Göç-Der also undertook efforts geared towards the right of return. They have now also begun to organize activities focusing on the problems of those continuing to live in large cities. Göç-Der's projects include the Legal Aid Center, the Basic Health Services Training and Counseling Project, the Children's Development and Training Center, the Institutional Capacity Building and Training Center, the Women's Psycho-Social Counseling Center, and the Project of Unknown Pains Where Fire Has Struck.

Göç-Der is currently implementing the EU project titled, "Social Justice for Internally Displaced Persons," launched on February 1, 2010, and coordinated by Mediterranean Göç-Der in partnership with Migration Platform member associations. It will be carried out for 16 months in the cities of Mersin, Diyarbakır, Batman, Van and Istanbul.

Göç-Der also conducts research and campaigns in five cities and their envioning provinces where victims of forced migration and internally displaced person reside, and they also plan to publish a booklet titled "Legal Rights Manual for Migrant Persons," in both Turkish and Kurdish.

Legal Aid Office against Custodial Sexual Harassment and Rape

The Legal Aid Office against Custodial Sexual Harassment and Rape is a legal assistance center founded in 1997, and provides support to people who have been subject to sexual

torture by the state and security forces during judicial or political arrests or due to their sexual orientation, and they also undertake legal advocacy in related fields. Another focus of the office is to devise alternative methods to eliminate the documentation problem in the corroboration of sexual torture. The Legal Aid Office undertakes advocacy through publications on the political and social dimensions of sexual harassment and rape perpetrated by the state, and drafts, publishes, and disseminates annual reports.³ They aim to open a shelter for the victims of state-perpetrated violence in the near future.

Foundation for Society and Legal Studies (TOHAV)

The Foundation for Society and Legal Studies, TOHAV, was founded in October 1994 in İstanbul by 46 lawyers registered to bar associations in İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir. TOHAV works to investigate and monitor human rights violations in all regions of Turkey, as well as to rehabilitate victims of torture. Post-OHAL (State of Emergency), the foundation is taking and litigating cases on property rights, right to life and right to organize. It also maintains the reports from committee visits to burned down and evacuated villages in the Kurdish region.

The Trauma Rehabilitation Center offers physical, psychological, social and legal assistance to individuals who have been subject to maltreatment and torture by public authorities. The refugee medical counseling unit is a counseling center providing medical assistance and social services to asylum seekers, migrants, and victims of migration who have migrated from their countries due to armed conflict, economic hardships or other reasons. The TOHAV EU Institute aims to contribute to the establishment of a modern, democratic society in Turkey. To this end, in order to promote the establishment and advancement of a democratic legal system in Turkey, the research and teaching of EU law and to contribute, publicize and analyze the application of EU institutions and norms beginning with the Copenhagen Political Criteria in Turkey's full membership accession process, and to enable the permanent establishment of EU institutions and norms in domestic law and their institutionalization, the Institute organizes seminars titled "EU Dialogues," bringing together domestic and

³ Eren Keskin and Leman Yurtsever, *Hepsi Gerçek, Devlet Kaynaklı Cinsel Şiddet* (It's all true: Sexual Violence Perpetrated by the State), (İstanbul: Punto, 2006).

international experts and other relevant actors from relevant fields. The Legal Unit offers free legal aid and counseling to victims of torture and maltreatment, victims of migration, internally displaced persons to support their rights including reclaiming property through members or volunteer litigators.

Their publications include the quarterly *Society and Law* journal, *The Kurdish Issue in European Parliament Decisions*, *Applying and Reporting to UN Mechanisms Guide*, *TOHAV 2007 Torture and Maltreatment Monitoring Report*, *2009 Torture and Maltreatment Monitoring Report*, Law no. 5233 and its application in the scope of internal displacement, reports of committee visits to certain burned down and evacuated villages, the Turkish translation of the European Court of Human Rights 5th Chamber “*Herri Batasuna and Batasuna vs. Spain*” case.

Additionally, in collaboration with Lawyers without Borders, Sweden, they organized a panel titled, “*Transitional Justice and Turkey*,” on December 12, 2009, and “*Possible Solutions for the Kurdish Issue*,” on November 7, 2009.

Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TIHV)

The Human Rights Foundation of Turkey is an independent NGO founded by the Human Rights Association (IHD) and 32 human rights advocates in 1990. TIHV’s central office is located in Ankara with representative offices in Istanbul, İzmir, Adana and Diyarbakır. The main aim of the organization is to prepare publications and documentation of issues of human rights and freedoms. It also provides physical and psychological treatment and rehabilitation for victims of torture and psychological assistance to their close relations at the Treatment and Rehabilitation Centers of the Foundation. In addition to the documentation of torture, TIHV also provides services in the sphere of right to legal remedy and undertakes public awareness raising efforts against torture and other human rights violations.

In Diyarbakır, TIHV launched a separate program in 2008 for the rehabilitation of collective social traumas stemming from the Kurdish issue. The social support program and the Social Trauma Program to be launched in 2010 are the two most comprehensive programs in the region that aim to alleviate the impact of thirty years of war.

Recently, TIHV has also extended its field of work to include the issue of “*Effective Protection of the Rights of Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Other Persons in Need of*

International Protection.” THIV has contributed to the drafting of the “İstanbul Protocol,” the “Handbook for the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel Inhumane Degrading Treatment or Punishments” and the “Human Rights in School Textbooks Project,” from 2002-2004, in collaboration with the History Foundation of Turkey.

78'ers Foundation

The 78'ers Foundation is an organization founded with the aim of organizing the aggrieved parties of the September 12, 1980 military coup, challenging the martial law, and becoming a part of the democratic movement in Turkey. As a result of the campaign called “Lifting of the Ban” (2004- 2006), which called for the reinstatement of public rights to Turkish and Kurdish prisoners who were imprisoned during the September 12 era and stripped of their rights, the 78'ers rights were reinstated through a parliamentary motion in 2004. The Foundation also conducts research on the May 1977 and 1978 Maraş Massacres for the establishment of justice and truth investigation commissions, or in preparation for when they will be established. One of the Foundation’s most important projects is the Diyarbakır Prison Project. In this project, the Foundation conducted in depth interviews with 435 people who were imprisoned in the Diyarbakır Prison between 1980-1984, and brought these testimonies to public attention in order to catalyze the establishment of a justice commission on Diyarbakır in the Turkish Parliament and to start a prosecution process. In this respect, the Diyarbakır Prison Truth and Justice Commission, founded with the initiative of the 78'ers Foundation, is a very important effort both in terms of being the first civil truth commission in Turkey and because it has created a collaboration among volunteers, and has brought together the academic, organizational and human resources located both in the region and in İstanbul.

Say No to Racism and Nationalism

Say No to Racism and Nationalism is a unified campaign front formed by activists struggling against nationalism and racism, and organizing themselves primarily through the internet. Recognizing nationalism and racism as a global problem not only of Turkey but the entire new liberal world, Say No activists also strive to be a part of this global movement. One of the main activities of Say No is campaigning on current political events such as in support of the initiative for establishing a peace process in the Kurdish issue (the Kurdish Expansion/Opening). The initiative launched called, “Monitoring Hate Crimes in the Media

Project” in 2009 acts upon the finding that the media in Turkey employs a biased and discriminatory language in its coverage of subjects like minority rights, armed conflicts and the EU membership process. Say No also organized various campaigns against hate crimes during this period. Their project book entitled “Hate Speech in the New Media” can be accessed through the following link: <http://www.nefretme.org/index.php/2010/09/yeni-medyada-nefret-soylemi-kitabi-cikti/>. Short term objectives of Say No include forming a hate crimes monitoring committee.

Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, TESEV

TESEV aims to conduct research to bridge findings based on scientific research and policy decisions, works to identify the major challenges in the democratization process in Turkey and strives to create a basis for social discussion and debate through research and reports in these areas. In this way, TESEV works in three tracks titled the Democratization Program, the Foreign Policy Program and the Good Governance Program. TESEV’s projects and publications on the Kurdish issue include: Reinstitution of Citizenship Rights after Internal Displacement and Social Rehabilitation (2004); Solving the Problems of Internally Displaced Persons: From a Participatory Model to a Culture of Dialogue Based on Empathy (2006); Monitoring of the Recommendations by Francis Deng, the Former Representative of the Secretary-General (RSG) on Internally Displaced Persons (2005-2006); Monitoring of the Van Action Plan (2007-2009); a project called Disrupting the Shield of Silence: Bringing Forth Narratives of Displacement towards a Reconciliatory National Dialogue (2009-2010); and a project called Discussing the report "A Roadmap for a Solution to the Kurdish Question: Policy Proposals from the Region to the Government" (2009-2010). Each project includes a report that can be accessed at TESEV’s website.

Evaluation

- As can be discerned from the above discussion of the interviewed NGOs, the subjective conditions of İstanbul and Diyarbakır play a crucial role in terms of the work areas of the NGOs located in these provinces. Due to the fact that rights violations in the Kurdish region remain very prevalent, tools such as protection, monitoring, and advocacy are currently the most widely employed in that region, whereas in İstanbul, NGOs concentrate more on coexistence and negotiation.

- Due to the injustice and hardship experienced in both cities, the services sphere has emerged as a major field of work. However, the services are mostly confined to legal and medical assistance, and in both cities the target group is generally the Kurdish population.
- It is also possible to state that the political struggle in the region has led to the emergence of certain needs. With the emergence of NGOs supported by or promoting different ideologies (such as circles close to the Justice Development Party (JDP), “liberal” circles, Kemalist circles) in Diyarbakır, competition has increased in the civil sphere. Therefore, training has become a major tool, and one can witness different groups (particularly the Kurdish opposition) striving to create Kurdish citizens in accordance with their own desire and ideology through this training.
- We had described the sphere that we define as the social sphere as a unity of representation, confrontation and discrimination. In this framework, it should be noted that the efforts in Diyarbakır concentrate on the representational side of the social sphere. However, representation is currently understood only in its narrowest sense. In other words, where the recognition of the Kurdish reality by the Turks and the State is regarded as the primary objective, the question of representation on various levels such as the labor market, poverty or migration, is not fully explored. It would be useful to underline once more that in terms of social empowerment and participation, training and education are the most popular tools.
- The most important initiatives NGOs in Diyarbakır undertake around the issue of discrimination are geared towards women. Recently, there has been both diverse research conducted on the issue and many different projects realized in this field.
- When it comes to confronting the recent past, this is mostly regarded as something that should be undertaken by the Turks and the state. Considering that one of the most important tools for confrontation is documentation, however, it should be noted that the NGOs and journalists in the region maintain many documents and testimonies, or, in other words, a wealth of resources.
- The civil initiatives in İstanbul are working on all of the three issues of confrontation, discrimination and representation. The History Foundation’s project on educational resources is a significant example of efforts against discrimination. In the field of

representation, there are efforts pertaining to multiculturalism and ethnic plurality. This means that representation is once again approached from an ethnic perspective. The most striking example in terms of confrontation is the project about the Diyarbakır Prison.

- One of the most important problems of NGOs in Diyarbakır is that even the most “civil” work they do is regarded by the state as an organic extension of the armed struggle, and is therefore over politicized. Civil initiatives are obstructed by the state through oppressive methods and for this reason the efforts are disrupted and all the social initiatives inadvertently shift to the legal sphere. The civil sphere, which was restricted through the unresolved assassinations by unidentified perpetrators in the 1990s, continues to be oppressed by the KCK (Kurdistan Communities Union) operations, or, that is to say, under a legal guise, presently.

- In İstanbul, it is relatively easier to cooperate with state institutions. On the other hand, the fact that the NGOs have limited organic ties to the region unlike the Diyarbakır region, is the most significant obstacle, before the politicization of their efforts and transforming them into means of struggle.

- Another problem many of the NGOs in Diyarbakır mention lies in their interaction with civil initiatives outside the region. While depicting this relationship, the NGOs relate two different discourses: in the first, it is stated that Westerners approach the region with a consumer perspective; they collect information and leave, and the information does not return to the region nor is it shared with it. Secondly, is the NGOs conveyed that the outside civil initiatives approach the region with colonialist actions, and these Western initiatives do not relate to the actors in the region on equal grounds. As far as we could observe during the interviews, in the course of these comments, organizations from the region disregard the different types of relationships Western NGOs form with the government. Instead, the similar approaches of both state-sponsored and independent NGOs is underlined.

- Next, we think there are two issues to be highlighted. The first is that the perception of Western based NGOs in Diyarbakır is identified with the official state ideology and the state itself. The second is the Western NGOs’ actual imposing attitudes, especially in terms of language. For instance, whether or not the word war can be used leads to discussions that forestall any collaboration. Or, some institutions are faced with the

accusation that they are not “independent.” In this respect, Western civil initiatives occasionally adopt an obstructive approach to the representation of Kurdish people due to their own problems in perception.

- As a result of structural inequalities, the issue of representation mentioned in the beginning of the report and the fact that a sense of justice still remains unattained, even during our interviews, the meetings seldom turned into dialogues where two NGOs from the Diyarbakır region and İstanbul spoke to each other. In this context, one of the findings of this report is that this lack of collaboration, consensus on language and unity seriously restricts the approach to social problems and results in an ineffectual division of labor. While services and political struggle are region-based, dissemination of information takes place from İstanbul through production of knowledge or certain consumer tools (exhibitions, publications). For projects geared towards coexistence, İstanbul offers very significant resources, however it should be noted that such efforts remain considerably confined in terms of class. It would not be wrong to assert that the fact that a widespread peace movement has yet to be born is again linked to such structural limitations.
- As mentioned above, the lack of awareness of the realities of the Kurdish geography in the Turkish public is the most significant obstacle before peace according to almost all the civil initiatives in the region. Numerous actors from the Kurdish civil initiative think that the NGOs located in the west are also responsible for this. For instance, it is mentioned that due to Kurdish people being considered the “usual suspects” by the state, the news and information produced by the Kurdish people in the region are deemed unreliable. For this reason, Turkish NGOs and opposition groups are in some way expected to work as mediators and negotiators, and the general sentiment is that giving voice to the violations Kurdish people face by these groups will contribute to resolving the problems. Kurdish civil actors believe that the national media, prominent and influential figures talking about the Kurdish issue, recounting the violations, unlawfulness and cruelty will be more effective than their own words.
- However, it is not very realistic for NGOs in the West to assume the expected role of the negotiator. At the end of the day, it should be said that many of these NGOs are also on the “usual suspects” list. Even though the idea that the concept of negotiation

should be explored from a broader perspective and should target social groups more than political actors is raised in the interviews, creative tactics appealing to the masses have yet to be devised.

- Problems stemming from state and judicial structures have been raised in almost all the interviews in various ways, and they affect all civil initiatives regardless of geography. While TIHV president Şebnem Korur Fincancı stated that certain amendments and reforms realized during the JDP period opened up venues to seek justice and legal remedies, she also emphasized their limitations. Fincancı stated that compared to the past, the TIHV-Ankara relationship has improved during JDP's power and they are getting more recognition from the ministries of Justice and Interior Affairs. She mentioned JDP's promise to establish independent monitoring commissions as a positive development, however she added that NGOs working on the issue have not been included in the commission founding process. Eren Keskin stated that no state official has been found guilty for sexual harassment or rape up to date. Diyarbakır Eğitim-Sen mentioned that their curriculum recommendations to the Ministry of National Education have been left unanswered. TOHAV stated the ECHR decision process is highly influenced by the political processes in Turkey. The History Foundation conveyed that even though the Board of Education and Discipline invited the foundation to its meetings, it did not allow for the alternative history books to be included in the official curriculum.
- Even though media-monitoring tools are gradually being used more extensively, it could be argued that the media and mass outreach campaigns are still not used adequately. It could be stated that due to the criticism from leftist circles, the NGOs in İstanbul avoid broad "liberal" projects.
- The lack of documentation and qualified staff in the field of law is a serious issue for all institutions providing legal services. Data required to prosecute past rights violations (location, date, etc.) are often missing. There is great discrepancy between cases that are monitored and those that have actually been filed. Also, many rights violations are not documented in the records of the bar/meya-der/yakay-der/göç-der/IHD. We believe that the establishment of a standardized documentation system

through collaboration with other NGOs will fill an important gap in the accountability process expected to take place in the future.

- There are no negotiated road maps or action plans on issues requiring urgent and concrete solutions such as the “right to return,” the mines, compensation, and village rangers. While there are studies based mostly on abstract information, it is imperative that localized participatory knowledge is generated on these issues, and advocacy efforts are undertaken for the implementation of this knowledge into social policy.
- Currently a standardized, everyday discrimination research is not done in Turkey, although this is used in many countries throughout the world. However, reports and recommendations based on such research is one of the tools that strengthens the opposition’s hands the most both in the social and political sphere.
- Financial limitations are the biggest obstacle for oppositional civil initiatives’ activities, developing technical capacity, and hiring qualified staff. It seems imperative that the issue of funding should be discussed in detail and once again in a collaborative manner.