

In this report, the organization "Rights and Freedoms of Turkmenistan Citizens" highlighted the violations committed by Turkmenistan in relation to its international obligations in the field of human rights. We would like to draw special attention to violations of rights related to gender, violations of rights during the COVID-19 pandemic, and violations of the rights of prisoners. Despite the fact that human rights violations are practically the norm for Turkmenistan, changes in certain aspects, as indicated in this report, requires immediate action.

## **1. Gender violence**

### **a) Ensuring women's rights in marital and family relationships.**

According to Article 14 of the Family Code of Turkmenistan, the state guarantees women and men of marriageable age, as established by Turkmenistan's legislation, an equal right to form a family. Currently, the state creates obstacles for girls who want to marry a foreign citizen.

There are not many official divorces in Turkmenistan. Despite the fact that polygamy is practiced in the country, a man is usually officially married only once. In the event of divorce, both official and unofficial, the house remains with the woman and her children. The man, to the best of his abilities, provides them with financial assistance. Marriages are also maintained due to the fact that they are often kinship marriages, both close and distant. In this case, an official divorce is practically impossible, despite mutual desire. There are also cases of forced divorces when a husband is forced to divorce his wife only because she is not of Turkmen nationality

### **b) Gender discrimination**

According to Article 26 of the Law of Turkmenistan "On state guarantees for ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men", women are guaranteed protection of their rights on the basis of gender. In Turkmenistan, police officers and special services can conduct forced gynecological examinations of young girls to determine the presence of the hymen.

Women who drive cars are also discriminated against in Turkmenistan. According to an unofficial directive from the country's leader, women are given all sorts of obstacles when obtaining or renewing their driver's licenses. Police officers justify this by stating that women should not be driving in principle.

The state also does not encourage the existence of companies whose leader is a woman who is not of Turkmen nationality. If such a company already exists, the

leader will be forced to give up their position and the company will be forced to close.

c) Sexual and domestic violence, coercion to cohabit

In accordance with Articles 107, 108, 111, 132, 134, 135 of the Criminal Code of Turkmenistan, domestic and sexual violence is widespread in Turkmenistan. Often in cases of domestic violence, women do not turn to law enforcement agencies. Such statements are not properly considered. Law enforcement officers believe that all problems of this kind should be resolved exclusively between spouses. In the country, there is a flourishing of coercion to cohabit by the so-called curators from the Ministry of National Security, attached to every budget institution in Turkmenistan. This is especially true for the healthcare system. If a female doctor does not have a "protector", in order to keep her job, she is forced to cohabit with her supervisor.

Cases of sexual violence against girls without sexual experience have become more frequent. Such violence is often committed by close relatives of the President of Turkmenistan.

## **2. COVID-19**

Until the present time, Turkmenistan has effectively been the only country that has not acknowledged the existence of the coronavirus.

Since late spring of 2020, hospitals have been refusing to accept patients with symptoms of the virus without explanation.

According to reports from doctors and medical staff from Turkmenistan, the country's doctors were prohibited from making a primary diagnosis of "pneumonia," let alone using the word coronavirus. Patients who were admitted to hospitals with complaints of dry cough, high temperature for several days, weakness, anosmia, and ageusia - primary diagnoses, especially for those over 65 years old, were hypertension, angina, or ischemic heart disease. In the medical histories of young people who were admitted with acute respiratory infections, seasonal allergies, bronchitis, or asthma were indicated. Laboratories were given separate instructions to present only negative tests for coronavirus when these tests arrived in the country. It is important to note separately that tests for coronavirus infection were received by the beginning of 2021, and in most cases, patients were not tested.

The employees of the State Security Service of Turkmenistan monitored the work of doctors and laboratory workers. These employees have the authority to interfere with the work of doctors and laboratories and dictate how to conduct treatment and tests properly.

Doctors and medical personnel were not properly provided with protective suits. Until December 2021, doctors did not have protocols for the treatment of coronavirus.

In cases where patients were hospitalized, drugs were purchased by the patient's relatives, as there were virtually no medical supplies in the clinic (<https://turkmenyurt.tv/turkmenistan-mirovaya-pandemia-covid19-turkmenistan-prodoljaet-otricat-nalichie-koronavirusa-v-strane/>).

The purchased vaccines were not stored in accordance with the instructions, and there were often fatal cases observed when administering the vaccines to patients.

Despite the preventive measures taken in the form of a ban on visits from relatives to prisoners from February-March 2020 to 2021, these measures, in fact, could be considered useless, as all employees periodically left the territory of prison camps and facilities. Testing among staff, as well as among prisoners, was not conducted.

(<https://turkmenyurt.tv/vse-bolee-ugrojaushaya-izolyacia-zakluchennyh-v-turkmenistane/>)

By unofficial order, prisoners observed a distance of several meters in relation to the employees of these institutions.

Daily, triple checks of the number of convicts, involving the formation of rows of five people in a sitting position, at a maximum distance of 40 cm from each other, were not canceled. Prisoners with tuberculosis died.

According to unofficial data, more than 500,000 people have died from coronavirus in Turkmenistan

### **3) Violations of prisoners' rights**

In Turkmenistan, a prisoner is subjected to both psychological and physical violence upon arrival at a correctional facility. Everything in correctional institutions must be paid for. If a prisoner does not have well-off relatives, they cannot avoid violence and hunger. Turkmenistan's prisons are very poorly equipped with both food and medication. It is worth noting separately that the Ovadan-Depe prison, where former officials and ministers are held, does not provide any food or medication to its inmates. The chance of surviving this prison is close to zero.

Relatives are not allowed to identify the bodies of the deceased. They are simply required to conduct funerals. No investigations into the causes of death are conducted. DNA analysis to confirm whose body was released is not performed.

Female prisoners are subjected to particularly severe persecution. They are forced to engage in sexual relations with the head of the correctional facility and officers. Female prisoners do not have proper medical help. They could be tortured by the

prison officers and the head of the prison. Women with cancer are not provided with assistance.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many female prisoners died due to the complete lack of treatment and oxygen. In rare cases of hospitalization, doctors were afraid to approach and provide any assistance, since no one bears any responsibility for the death of a prisoner. In cases where convicts developed a cough, they were immediately transferred to a separate barrack.

Most of the female prisoners have died.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Remove curators from the State Security Service and prohibit coercion to cohabit.
2. Prohibit State Security Service employees from interfering in the work of doctors.
3. Stop the practice of rape by relatives of the country's president and bring them to criminal responsibility for the crimes committed.
4. Recognize the presence of coronavirus in the country and provide the population with free treatment in accordance with the country's legislation.
5. Provide medical institutions with refrigerators for proper storage of vaccines.
6. Stop physical violence in correctional institutions, change the conditions of detention of prisoners in accordance with international standards, and allow international representatives to enter correctional institutions.
7. Allow international organizations access to correctional institutions and prisons in Turkmenistan.