
ANNEX 1

Incidents against Protestant churches in 2017 and 2018

ANNEX 2

Challenges related to the recognition of places of worship in 2017 and 2018

Submitted to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights by the World Evangelical Alliance, the Baptist World Alliance, and the Protestant Kiliseler Derneği (Association of Protestant Churches – Turkey), ahead of the Universal Periodic Review of Turkey during the UPR 35th session.

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ANNEX 1: Incidents against Protestant churches in 2017 and 2018

1. The following is a list of incidents against the Protestant churches and their members, documented by the TeK in 2017 and 2018. This list is not exhaustive.

2. March 27, 2017: A threatening letter was sent to Radio Shema, a radio station that broadcasts Christian programming in Ankara. The incident was reported to security forces and the protective measures for the director of the radio and the station itself were increased.
3. July 20, 2017: A New Testament book was burned in front of the Izmir Yeni Dogus church and was left at the church’s door. The incident was reported to the security forces but, since the church camera system was broken, the perpetrator or perpetrators of this attack could not be identified.

4. July 28, 2017: At night, an Islamic slogan was written on the wall of the Balikesir Church. Suspicious individuals were quickly caught when the incident was reported to the police. The suspects were released by the court pending their trial on December 5, 2017. At their trial they apologized and said they were sorry for the incident. The church withdrew its complaint.

5. November 23, 2017: the window of the Malatya Kurtulus Church office was broken in an act of vandalism. The perpetrator was shortly apprehended after the church informed the security forces. After the perpetrator’s family apologized, paid for the repair of the window and a report was received that the person in question was mentally unstable, the complaint was withdrawn.

6. November 27, 2017: The sign of the Bahcelievler Lutuf Church was stolen. The incident was reported to the security forces. Legal proceedings are ongoing.

7. December 5, 2017: the windows of the Istanbul Kadikoy International Church were broken in an act of vandalism. After reporting the incident to the security forces, the perpetrator was quickly apprehended. The attacker was subsequently released by the prosecutor. The legal process continues.

8. December 7, 2017: A death threat was left under the Balikesir Church door. The threat was directed at the church leader and the assistant working at the church. The issue was reported to the security forces and the prosecutor. After this threat was given, the assistant’s home windows were broken. The security forces have increased their security precautions. The investigation continues.

9. During 2017 Christmas and New Year season, anti-Christmas and anti-New Year campaigns carried out. Antagonistic posters were hung on the streets of major cities (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and others), brochures were distributed, and the participation in these campaigns by various public institutions created an intense atmosphere of hate. These campaigns created apprehension during the various Christmas celebrations.

10. April 4, 2018: The pastor of Diyarbakir Protestant Church, Ahmet Güvener, received repeated threatening and abusive telephone calls. After reporting the incident to security forces the prosecutor decided that as the suspect’s telephone had been used by others and the perpetrator was a minor there was no need to open a case.

11. June 2018: The signs erected by Mardin Metropolitan Municipality identifying Mardin Protestant Church as a historic building and directing visitors to the church were broken or removed several times by unknown persons. The incidents were reported to the security forces but the perpetrator(s) were never apprehended.
12. Christmas 2018: The Diyarbakir Protestant Church was stoned repeatedly by minors. No attempt was made to investigate those who would have been inciting or encouraging the children to do this, and because the perpetrators were minors no action was taken. The church has stated that these attacks were as a result of the increased hate speech that occurs at Christmas time.

13. Christmas 2018 and New Year: Various anti-Christmas and anti-New Year campaigns were carried out. Antagonistic posters were hung on the streets, brochures were distributed, social media campaigns were conducted, and news was published in newspapers and on social media; the participation in these campaigns by various public institutions created an intense atmosphere of hate. In particular, there was a significant increase in abusive and insulting comments from users of social media and newspaper websites towards Christianity and Christians. These campaigns created apprehension during the various Christmas celebrations. The silence of the Government and the State in the face of such hate campaigns aimed at inciting hatred has caused deep disappointment within the Protestant Community.

ANNEX 2: Challenges related to the recognition of places of worship in 2017 and 2018

14. The following is a list of challenges related to the official recognition, or lack therefore, of places of worship, documented by the TeK in 2017 and 2018. The list is not exhaustive.

15. August 25, 2017: Istanbul Bahcelievler Lutuf Church, was in the process of renovating an additional rented meeting room, when the Bahcelievler Municipality sealed the room without giving any explanation or documentation. During discussions with municipal authorities, it was verbally indicated that they would not permit a church or a church association to be there. However, if the intent to establish a church was abandoned, they would remove the seal. After remaining sealed for about a month, in order to protect the landlord from unfair treatment through this process, the church notified the city that the room would not be used as a church meeting place. After this, the room was opened by municipal crews. The church felt pressed to abandon the idea of establishing a church association and forming a new meeting place.

16. September 5, 2017: The İzmir Cigli Church, which is associated with the Isevi Topluluklar Association, had its sign removed, was sealed and closed by the İzmir Cigli Municipality in response to negative press coverage concerning the church as well as the word “church” being written on its sign. The result of talks with the municipality was that the church, which had remained closed for one week, would be reopened on the condition of the removal of the “church” sign and that the place was to be used as an association. The church’s activities continue at this place.

17. October 25, 2017: The İzmir Karataş Church, which is associated with the Isevi Topluluklar Association, was going to be closed by the İzmir Konak Municipality because of negative press coverage and the word “church” being written on their sign. But when informed that the place
was an association and as a result of the removing of the “church” sign, the building was not closed and no negative incident occurred.

18. November 3, 2017: Despite having gone through a proper procedure to obtain a permit, just before the Samsun Protestant Church opened their new ministry center, the building was sealed by the Atakum Municipality. After discussions the building was unsealed, the official procedures were completed, and the building was opened for use by the Samsun Protestant Church.

19. On March 25, 2016, the Diyarbakir Protestant Church, other churches within the Diyarbakir Sur district, and 6300 other parcels of land were declared national property by a Cabinet decision announced in the Official Newspaper. Legal proceedings against this decision have begun. Officials have told the church leaders during this period that the church will be returned to the owners. However, the Diyarbakir Protestant Church had recently obtained the building next to the church along with 3 parcels of land they use for a garden; their concern over that real estate continues as does the legal proceedings associated with them. On Feb 15, 2017, the Section of the Department of the State Council decided to block the outworking of the decision to nationalize church buildings. The demand to stop the nationalizing of the church’s annex and garden was rejected however. This decision created great frustration. The Diyarbakir Protestant community is still using their church building and worship continues there. The courts cases are ongoing at time of writing of this report. The failure to resolve the problems related to their adjacent property gives rise to fears that they could lose their main church building.