

Human rights watch: turkis-kurdish conflict assignment

[Art & Culture](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Throughout history and still today there have been many conflicts, wars and broken promises all over the world. These conflicts and wars include civil wars, small wars, world wars and human rights movements. One of the main problems with these are that there are innocent lives being tortured and killed. A perfect example of this takes place in the Turkish-Kurdish dilemma in a region of the world that connects Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. In this report I will bring awareness to a conflict that needs to be resolved for the best interest of both parties as well as the world.

I will examine the Human Rights Watch article that was published in March of 1993 by Helsinki Watch. I will look into details of killings, disappearances and torture of the Kurdish population by the Turkish government. The Kurdish population, a population of roughly 30 million which stretches over 5 countries including Iraq, Iran, Azerbaijan and Syria but mainly in Turkey, where the most number of casualties have occurred. This conflict can be considered a civil war, a small war that can lead to a world war and also a human rights matter.

Although there have been steps taken recently to ease this problem there are still many unanswered questions remaining. To fully understand the modern day Kurdish issue, we must first understand the history behind it and who the Kurds are. According to most recent census of Turkey, the Kurds make up about 20% of the population and the dominate group, the Turks, account for the remaining 80% of the population. The Kurds, often referred to as " Mountain Turks" in Turkey are a Sunni Muslim people living primarily in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran as mentioned before however, I will mainly focus on Turkey in this report.

<https://assignbuster.com/human-rights-watch-turkis-kurdish-conflict-assignment/>

The Kurdish people has a distinct culture that is not at all like their Turkish, Persian, and Arabic neighbors. Kurdish people have been around for a very long time however the desire for a Kurdish homeland didn't begin until World War I. The Kurds were promised a land that they can call their own in the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, however when Kemal Ataturk rose to power in the early 1920s in Turkey he denied the Kurds their own country and any political representation in Turkey. This was the very beginning of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict that has since taken many lives.

Once Ataturk rejected land to the Kurds, the Kurds formed a semi-independent state called Kurdistan which now exists only in the minds of the Kurds. The Turks did not favor this and made laws against the Kurds. For example one of the laws included was not being able to speak the native Kurdish language in public places. The Turkish government made it difficult for the Kurdish people to express the culture. These conflicts between Turkey and the Kurds also have great relevance to geography. The Kurds have historical claims to the territory that they originally originated from (southeastern part of Turkey).

They have lived in the area for over 2000 years. Once the world started becoming modern and countries started to be formed the Kurds desired their own just like every other group of people. Some were successful, the Kurds were not. The Kurds are ethnically and culturally different from both the Turks and the Arabs. They speak a different language, and while all three groups are Muslim, they all practice different forms. Since Turkey and the

Arab nations have their own land to practice their own language and form of religion the Kurds also wanted and still want the same.

The Turkish government viewed any religious or ethnic identity that was not their own to be a threat to the state. In the Treaty of Lausanne, signed in July 1923, did not mention the Kurds by name but did declare that all citizens of Turkey should be equal before the law without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion. Though this treaty didn't really solve much, moving to the mid to late 1900s steps were taken to bring some equality in Turkey to Kurds. Schools, roads and hospitals were built until a conflict within the Turkish government that fed fuel to this burning flame.

These problems provoked the Kurds to form a group called The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) under Abdullah Ocalan. The PKK is a rebellious group and has been listed as a terrorist organization ironically most of the Kurds themselves do not support the PKK. The Turkish government responded to this by stating that they do not have a problem with the Kurds, some even denied the whole conflict. The problem was with the terrorist and the Kurds must fix this domestic problem they have within themselves if they want to move forward.

Since the early 1980s there has been an armed struggle in large areas of eastern Turkey, between the Turkish state and the PKK. In the early 1990s this conflict started to take lives regularly. An estimated one to three million people was displaced as Turkish security forces systematically evacuated or destroyed villages. International human rights organizations concluded at the time that a new phase in the war had begun. This leads me to the article

<https://assignbuster.com/human-rights-watch-turkis-kurdish-conflict-assignment/>

on Human Rights Watch published on March of 1993 by Helsinki Watch about the conflict between the Turkish government and the Kurds during in 1980s and 1990s.

Helsinki Watch interviewed many Kurds as well as Turkish officials and brought great exposure to this violent crime by the Turkish government. Over the years, mass-arrests, beatings, kidnappings and torture tactics have become extremely common within this region as tensions have escalated according to the article. Helsinki Watch investigated and reported these abuses by the government and military including assassinations, killings, raids, torture and land mines. Living in the south-eastern part of Turkey during this time was very frightening. Helsinki Watch reports that people are greatly pressured.

Even if they were to go to the hospital they were interrogated by the police before they are given any medical attention. " You can't go out at night. You can't sleep on the roof in the summer time, which is our tradition. You can't go to work late at night??? you'll be detained by the police. The next day at 3: 00 p. m. they were all released without charges," (page 10) one human rights activist in Adana, Turkey (south-eastern tip of Turkey) told Helsinki Watch. Civilians even feared the police during this time. People in that region of Turkey depend mainly on their live stock (which includes cows, goats, and sheep) for food and wealth.

People often complained about their animals not being able to roam freely in the plains and feed themselves because of the land mines the military puts out. These mines not only detonate when animals step on them but also

<https://assignbuster.com/human-rights-watch-turkis-kurdish-conflict-assignment/>

when civilians walk on them because they are scatter randomly and are impossible to spot. The Kurds report that sometimes the military doesn't even know where they set the mines. This is the cause of some deaths of Kurdish people as well as the military as Helsinki Watch reports that the PKK also set mines in paths of the Turkish military.

In the article Helsinki Watch mentions incidents of abuses by the PKK as well as it becomes a seesaw battle. An example of one of the incidents follows; " On June 26, PKK rebels killed ten worshippers at a mosque in Diyarbakir; thirty rebels allegedly drove men from the mosque, tied their hands and shot them with automatic weapons. " Killing was the most popular way of getting a message across during this time in south-eastern Turkey. Turkish police shot and killed more than 100 peaceful demonstrators provoking more violence by the PKK in retaliation. Helsinki Watch reports no one has been charged with any of the deaths.

They also bring it to the attention that according to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) under certain articles it specifically points out law enforcement officials may only use force when absolutely necessary. Article 2 states; " Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law. No one shall be deprived of his life intentionally save in the execution of a sentence of a court following his conviction of a crime for which this penalty is provided by the law. " Helsinki Watch reports on thirteen journalists on being suspiciously murdered.

Of the thirteen all but two wrote about pro-Kurdish journals. Most of them were murdered execution style (shot from the back) some were shot holding

<https://assignbuster.com/human-rights-watch-turkis-kurdish-conflict-assignment/>

white flags. Some people may consider these journalists to be lucky to instantly die with a gunshot. These people are the ones who were tortured nearly to death or in most cases to death. " Torture is a crime against humanity; it is our duty to put an end to it. " (Page 22) These words belong to Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel of Turkey were he promised to end torture in Turkey. Which according to Helsinki Watch, he did not keep.

Some tortured methods used by the Turkish police and military were tying the limbs back and giving electrocution to the sensitive parts of the body, beating of the bottom of feet until disoriented, rape, shooting high pressure water to the victims, attack dogs, and threatening of life and families life just to name a few, of course not limited to only these. Helsinki Watch gives eight cases of people who were tortured to death. Out of these eight, Mehmet Yilmaz was one. He was taken into custody by police on April 21. Five days later he died in Diyarbakir at the age of 80.

His autopsy revealed his death was caused by bleeding of the brain.

Diyarbakir officials said it was due to blood pressure but Mr. Yilmaz's wife reported that her husband did not have any health problems. Some of the people that suspiciously died while in police custody did have gunshots to the head. Officials said these people committed suicide with a gun they found. During this investigation Helsinki Watch interviewed a 20-year old Kurdish male in Istanbul, Turkey. He reports in this interview that he was legally selling magazines at a festival and was detained by police later that day.

Since the time he was detained to the time he was released he was tortured continuously. He was given electric shock to his genitals, beat with sticks and weapons, and had been burned with cigarette. He was then taken to a doctor with marks all over his body but no torture marks were reported. He was later forced to sign a statement where he spent about 4 months in prison and was charged with separatism and slogans. Looking forward Helsinki Watch ends the report by contacting government officials about what steps that have or will be taken to improve the Turkish-Kurdish conflict in Turkey as well as the killings and tortures.

One answer was given by Minister of Human Rights Mehmet Kahraman stating the proposed law reform bill which will renovate prisons and distribute a book on human rights to all police academies. They have also come forward by expelling ten police officers due to mistreatment of prisoners. Istanbul Security Directorate Head (chief of police) Necdet Menzir tells Helsinki Watch they are renovating the buildings where people are interrogated and will be placing cameras, computers, and also more training to the police.

He doesn't forget to mention that all of this takes time and money. The new law reform bill in Turkey brings justice to the detainees and shows steps that Turkey is taking a big leap in human rights movements. The new law reform forbids torture and ill-treatment even though it was also previously forbidden. It will not solve everything, it will not fixed broken promises, it will not answered the mysterious questions and it will not bring full peace in the Turkish-Kurdish conflicts but it will serve as justice to many people.