Health Care in the Shadow of Cultural Genocide in the Turkish part of Kurdistan

The aim of this research is to study the health situation in the Turkish part of Kurdistan (Southeast Turkey) during the 1990s. Since 1984 there has been going on an armed conflict between the Turkish army and Kurdistan Labour Party, the PKK. Since 1984 the army has used the strategy of low-intensity war towards the guerillas. To cut the supply routes of the guerillas, the army has forced people from three thousand villages to leave their homes. About three million Kurds live in Turkey as internally displaced persons.

The Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923 with the Treaty of Lausanne, according to which the only minorities in Turkey are some non-muslim ones. According to the Constitution from 1982, there are no minorities in Turkey, and the mother language of all citizens' is Turkish, so there is no need even to discuss about the rights of minorities. The assimilation policy run by the state fills the criteria of cultural genocide.

The theoretical framework of this research is theories connected to cultural genocide and low-intensity warfare. The information is collected for example from statistics of the State Institute of Statistics of Turkey; from reports given out by the U.S. Department of State, Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, Turkish Medical Association and the Labour Union of Health Care Saglik Sen; from travel reports and by interviewing Kurds who have visited the region. I have myself collected information in Turkey five weeks, during four journeys in 1997-1999.

In the State of Emergency Region the amount of all diseases, of which there is any information available, has increased during the 1990s. The number of reported cases of malaria has became tenfold during some years, but the prevention of malaria has decreased during the same period. 19 polio cases were reported in 1998 in the region. In October 1998 the WHO arranged in the Kurdish region in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria a campaign during which 2,3 million children were vaccinated towards polio. Also the amount of cholera, tuberculosis, hepatitis B and trachoma has increased during the 1990s. The Turkish Medical Association estimates that infant mortality rate in the Kurdish provinces is two or three times as high as in other parts of Turkey. While the amount of diseases has increased, many of health centers have been closed due to lack of labour, or they have been taken into military use.

No exact, trustworthy information about the situation is available. Turkey has prevented international humanitarian organisations, like the Red Cross and Médecin Sans Frontières, to make any surveys about the situation, and to deliver aid to the homeless people. The denial of doing research is one aspect of cultural genocide: in Turkey Kurdish language, culture and identity are forbidden, but in addition to that, it is impossible to find information about the Kurds in statistics and research.

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