

A political prisoner's hunger strike against isolation in Turkish prisons passes 350 days

Hakan Özal**29 October 2025**

Serkan Onur Yilmaz, a political prisoner held at Bolu F-Type Prison, has passed the 350th day of his hunger strike against the new high-security prison model. Yilmaz's health condition is critical.

Yilmaz demands an end to the increasingly widespread use of severe isolation in Turkey and the inhumane conditions in S, Y, and R type prisons, known as "well-type" prisons. This is a common demand among many political prisoners.

The Sosyalist Eitim Partisi-Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party-Fourth International) in Turkey advocates the fundamental right of all individuals detained to be held in conditions consistent with the principles of human dignity and health. The "well-type" prisons, where solitary confinement has been transformed into a systematic form of torture, must be closed and the release of political prisoners must be carried out immediately.

In reports by the Civil Society in the Penal System (CİSST) and the Contemporary Lawyers Association (ÇHD), these prisons are described as "isolation centers" whose architectural structures and operations systematically destroy the social, sensory, and psychological integrity of prisoners.

In a statement in September 2025, the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TİHV) announced that the long-term isolation imposed in these prisons causes irreversible physical and psychological damage.

Similarly, prison reports prepared by the Human Rights Association (HİD) and the Lawyers for Freedom Association (ÖHD) in October 2025 emphasized that these prisons, with their "concrete coffin"-like structure, blocked access to sunlight and air circulation, and were therefore unsuitable for human life.

The Prison Commission of ÇHD Istanbul Branch

confirmed in August that Yilmaz's hunger strike was the longest underway in Turkey and that his health had reached a critical stage. Attorney Balım dil Deniz stated that Yilmaz could no longer walk, had developed wounds on his hands and back, and was experiencing increased nerve pain, adding, that Yilmaz's demands were reasonable "however, the Ministry of Justice remains silent."

Ali Hasan Akgül, a member of the long-established music group Grup Yorum—which is listened to by millions of people—described the conditions in these prisons at the same press conference: "We are in our cells for 23 hours and have one hour of fresh air. This means being cut off from nature and the world. You don't feel the wind; if you're lucky, you see the sun once." Akgün was released in July after a 144-day hunger strike.

Yilmaz began his hunger strike at Antalya High Security Prison but was transferred to Bolu Type F Prison on the 213th day of his action. Yilmaz continues his hunger strike demanding that he and other prisoners be transferred to prisons that are not "well-type."

TİHV's 2025 assessment indicates that long-term hunger strikes can result in permanent neurological damage and organ failure. For this reason, ÇHD states that Yilmaz is approaching an "irreversible threshold" with each passing day and that his demands must be met without delay.

As Yilmaz reached the 350th day of his hunger strike, various organizations in Turkey and Europe called for a one-day solidarity action. Members of the Association for Solidarity with Families of Prisoners and Convicts (TAYAD), the Kadıköy People's Assembly, the Action Unity Announcement Initiative, and various organizations in Europe stated that Yilmaz's demands "must be met without delay."

The Greece People's Front stated in a press release that Turkey's high-security prison system operates in the same manner as similar isolation structures in Europe, adding that "well-type" prisons target not only prisoners but also freedom of thought and association." The Anatolian Alevi Committee in Europa also issued a statement calling for solidarity with Yilmaz, stating that isolation practices "eliminate the basic conditions of human nature."

The origins of solitary confinement practices in Turkey's prison system date back to the structural transformation initiated after the NATO-backed military coup of September 12, 1980. During this period, a shift was made from the traditional ward system to a new cell-based architecture to prevent collective resistance and solidarity among political prisoners.

This process, which began in the late 1980s with E-type prisons, deepened in the 1990s with H-type prisons; with the introduction of F-type prisons in 2000, the system was transformed into an execution regime based on individual cell isolation.

In response to the hunger strike and death fast launched by more than 800 political prisoners against F-type prisons, the government of Bülent Ecevit, Prime Minister of the social democratic Democratic Left Party (DSP), launched the "Return to Life Operation" on December 19, 2000. Approximately 10,000 security personnel were deployed to 20 different prisons during these operations, in which 30 prisoners were killed and hundreds injured or subjected to severe torture. This operation was not merely a "security intervention" but a turning point that paved the way for the permanent implementation of isolation policies.

Following 2002, during the Justice and Development Party (AKP) governments, this model was expanded and reproduced in the form of S, Y, and R type prisons. These structures are a more severe version of the isolation initiated in F-type prisons, both architecturally and administratively.

These high-security prisons, known as "well-type" prisons, represent the most advanced stage of institutionalization of the isolation regime in Turkey's prison system. Prisoners spend 23 hours a day in windowless, cramped spaces, seeing the sky for only one hour.

Prison architecture targets the prisoner's human,

cognitive, and emotional capacities by minimizing their social interactions. Constant camera surveillance, the elimination of privacy, and practices such as "roll call" create a surveillance system in which prisoners cannot control their own existence.

These inhumane practices are far from unique to Turkey and are part of a global trend where ruling classes eliminate fundamental democratic rights to establish dictatorial regimes. "Well-type" prisons are concrete products of the capitalist state apparatus' authoritarian tendencies, primarily targeting the working class. This structure, developed by the state under the guise of "security" policy, has become an administrative tool for suppressing political opposition and social solidarity. Therefore, the struggle against these inhumane practices in prisons is not merely a human rights issue, but a broader class and political issue.

The struggle in prisons is an integral part of the struggle for democratic and social rights outside. The only way to secure these rights is for the working class, which forms the social base of this struggle, to take power.



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