



Alliance *for*  
Shared Values

July 29, 2017

### **A Response to “The Analysis of Forty Years of the Gulen Movement” Released by the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs**

With the release of their report on July 14, 2017, entitled, “The Analysis of Forty Years of the Gulen Movement,” it has become exceedingly clear that the Turkish Religious Directorate has fallen into a deep institutional and religious crisis at the political behest of one man, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Alliance for Shared Values, representing the voices of a number of Hizmet affiliated civil society organizations in the United States, wholeheartedly rejects the conclusions of this report from the Turkish Religious Directorate.

In urging the Directorate to prepare this report, Erdogan's goal was not to produce a scientific and objective study, but to echo his political labeling of the Hizmet Movement as a criminal network through the chamber of the Directorate.

As directly expressed by the Directorate’s President Görmez, members of the Higher Council of Religious Affairs did not initiate this study because they found problems in the basic values of the Hizmet Movement or in the behaviors of its members, nor because have they found their understandings and practices religiously insulting. On the contrary, this work was initiated at the request of President Erdogan and its conclusions were dictated by Erdogan from the beginning. The remarkable parallels between the “findings” of the report and the opinions expressed by President Erdogan in his opening speech of the Council’s meeting in August 2016 are therefore not surprising.

This effort is just the latest one from Erdogan in trying to spread to the world the baseless claim that the peaceful Islamic scholar and preacher Fethullah Gulen and the Hizmet movement were behind the deplorable failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016. Since that infamous day, Erdogan has been unable to provide convincing evidence against the Hizmet Movement, relying instead on his control of Turkish

media to disseminate pro-government propaganda and his control of the policy and judiciary to arrest, imprison or fire hundreds of thousands of innocent people.

Furthermore, he has pursued the Hizmet movement outside of Turkey, leveraging the Turkish state's support for foreign governments to close schools and institutions and deport peaceful, law-abiding people. Erdogan's efforts to dismantle Hizmet initiatives outside of Turkey have, thankfully, largely failed, despite bringing to bear enormous financial resources and the full weight of the state's bureaucratic apparatus.

Due to these failures in the international arena, Erdogan has turned to religious levers to attack the peaceful Hizmet movement, including constructing a false narrative through the Turkish Religious Directorate and a seminary delegation of scholars.

Sadly, the President of the Directorate of Religious Affairs has expressed himself that the institution is being used to put a religious legitimacy on this illegitimate and deliberate extermination campaign. This will continue to deeply undermine the religion-state-society relations in Turkey, which are already considerably strained.

It is a deep shame that the Turkish Religious Directorate has succumbed to Erdogan's pressure. But given the autocratic situation in Turkey these days, it is hardly surprising. This report is simply a new indicator of the status of President's totalitarian control over the state institutions of the Republic of Turkey. The horrifying experience of Hizmet movement under Erdogan regime is proof that no religious or civic group in Turkey is safe from becoming the next target of persecution by the state.

Because of its political motivation, baseless premises and foregone conclusions, the report does not deserve a dignified response by Hizmet participants. But for the Muslim audiences who are confused by it we would like to mention one fact: Neither the Directorate of Religious Affairs as an institution, nor its directors issued any significant criticism against Hizmet movement or Mr. Gulen congruent with the claims of this report up until December 2013 when then prime minister Erdogan decided to label a corruption probe a "judicial coup" against his government and accuse Gulen-sympathizers within the judiciary to be behind it.

To the contrary, throughout Mr. Gulen's career of over 30 years as a preacher and the development of the Hizmet movement during this time there have been numerous messages of recognition and praise at the efforts of Mr. Gulen and

Hizmet participants, including those by former presidents of Directorate of Religious Affairs.

Mr. Gulen served as an imam, Qur'an instructor, local preacher, Qur'an school director, and regional preacher from 1959 until 1981 as a state employee with a religious license by the Directorate. Between 1989 and 1991 Mr. Gulen was invited to preach at the largest mosques in Istanbul, such as the world famous Blue Mosque, to tens of thousands of listeners, as invited and authorized by the Directorate.

Therefore we believe that the record of the Directorate's attitude toward Mr. Gulen and their expressions of praise for the past 40 years constitute the best response to their report.

We invite the High Council of Religious Affairs to declare clearly what criteria they used to reach their conclusions in preparing this report and analyze speeches and actions by President Erdogan, his close affiliates and party leaders using the same criteria.

Finally, the statement by the Directorate of Religious Affairs clearly show that Erdogan uses the guise of religion and religious institutions to further his political aims.