



PRESS RELEASE

It has been deemed beneficial to share the following with the public regarding recent developments caused by the ongoing debate over religious officials sent to Germany by the Presidency of Religious Affairs.

It has been found out in the media that the houses of four clerics in Bad Godesberg, Fürthen-Sieg, Engelskirchen, and Bergneustadt were searched on 15.02.2017 in the states of North Rhine-Westphalia and Rheinland-Pfalz in Germany with the order of the Attorney General.

According to the reports in German media, private computers of two clerics have been seized under the investigation launched over claims of unlawful intelligence operations by imams assigned by the Presidency of Religious Affairs to DİTİB (Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs) mosques.

Since the claims first emerged, both the Presidency of Religious Affairs and DİTİB have expressly declared to the public that the clerics did not engage in any illegal acts. Furthermore, the Presidency shared information with Germany officials evidencing the situation. In that context, six clerics who were evaluated to have exceeded their authority were sent back to their posts in Turkey to maintain the mutual trust between two countries and as a gesture of goodwill despite never participating in any act of intelligence-gathering or espionage.

A perception operation has been launched with a false accusation even though the text that serves the basis for said accusation has the main theme of religion being misinterpreted, exploited, and abused for violence which were all discussed at the 9th Eurasian Islamic Council. Both our Presidency, our religious officials, and DİTİB which carries out religious services in Germany have been the target of defamation in this way and their followers have been offended.

For more than 40 years, the Presidency of Religious Affairs has guided Muslims of Turkish origin across Europe and particularly in Germany to help them fulfill their religious obligations. The Presidency of Religious Affairs has made major contributions to an understanding of religion based on scientific knowledge and away from extremism, to the peace and welfare of society, to societal security, to culture of living together, to harmony, and to helping people live away from violence and hatred.

The cooperation between the Presidency of Religious Affairs and DİTİB has a character that can serve as an example to inter-communal religious relations and can also be described as the Turkish-German model in terms of religious service. The common ground between the Presidency of Religious Affairs and DİTİB on religious references is too vital to be abused for any diplomatic, political, and ideological manipulation and argument. In the course of 40 years, it is without question that Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs has accepted international law, local legal norms, fundamental human rights and religious liberties as basis and operated accordingly. This

principle will be earnestly preserved henceforth as it has been thus far. No religious official has ever been allowed to turn towards any activity outside their job description, and no incident that could be deemed illegal has ever taken place in the meantime.

Using religious officials and religious organizations for domestic politics with unfounded and baseless allegations is unacceptable. It is clear that the statements and stories are intentional and futile which offend, marginalize, ostracize, and accuse a distinguished organization such as the Presidency of Religious Affairs which offers services in its field on a global scale, carries out humanitarian and charitable activities, and has the respect of all parties it works with; DİTİB which is the largest Muslim non-governmental organization in Germany and which has been the warrant of common sense, harmony, peace, and security since the day it was founded; and also the religious officials who guide others in faith, worship, and morals, and elevate religious and humane virtues in any occasion. These attempts have inflicted a moral and conscientious wound on not only over three million Turks who have made Germany their home but also on more than five million Muslims in the country.

It is possible that the unfounded statements, stories, and allegations spread through the media will cause irreparable trauma on innocent and religious masses. And it is obvious that such traumas will not serve social peace and safety. Instead of damaging and devastating the Turkish-German cooperation model which has been in service for nearly half a century in the field of religion, the course to follow must be to further improve, solidify, and better the conditions in education, culture, harmony, and integration. It will undoubtedly make it easier to resolve the issues when those with political and public responsibilities avoid any rush and careless statements.

Benefitting from the spiritual guidance, knowledge, and experience of the Presidency of Religious Affairs would not be a shortcoming; on the contrary, it would bring prestige and reliability to Muslim religious organizations all around the world, especially to DİTİB. The Presidency of Religious Affairs has always respected the legal norms applicable to religious legal entities with whom it maintains contact.

One of the most fundamental service principles of the Presidency of Religious Affairs is political impartiality. The Presidency is extremely sensitive about its religious officials abiding by this principle in their services, and it is determined to maintain the sensitivity thereafter.

Due to the religious tradition and understanding it has long adopted, the Presidency of Religious Affairs categorically separates itself from radical structures, terrorist groups, and circles that exploit religion. It does not allow for elements in its services that adopt such wrong ideas. The most recent manifestations of such groups and elements are terrorist organizations such as DAESH which does not in any way chime with the peaceful messages of Islam and FETO which operates on a global scale by exploiting religion and has turned into a structure threatening law and order. The Presidency of Religious Affairs expects the same level of sensitivity against these sorts of terrorist groups from organizations that it considers partners in religious service in Turkey and abroad.

The reasonable, beneficial, and peaceful option in tackling with humanitarian issues in the world such as extremism, terror, and immigration is to benefit from the tradition, experience, and potential of both the Presidency of Religious Affairs and DİTİB.

We have full confidence that especially people of Turkish origin, Muslims in Germany, and everyone with a common sense regardless of their faith, religion, and ethnicity will act without getting despaired and angry, and reason will prevail in the end.

We believe that German officials at every federal and state level will do their part in sensibly ending this unreasonable and pointless process which disregards the gains and experience obtained in the forty-year period and makes no contribution to building the future.

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Presidency of Religious Affairs