



Pinar Ilkkaracan

Pinar Ilkkaracan (born in 1961) is a women's rights activist and psychotherapist. Founder of the renowned Turkish NGO [Women for Women's Human Rights - New Ways](#), she was one of the driving forces behind a successful campaign to enshrine gender equality in Turkey's reformed penal code. Ilkkaracan also launched an [international network of women's NGOs from Muslim countries](#) and worked with the [UN Commission on the Status of Women](#).

Ilkkaracan graduated from Bogazici University in 1988 with a master's degree in psychological counselling and then moved to Berlin. As she told ESI, the atmosphere that followed the 1980 coup and persisted throughout the 1980s "was terrible for me." In Berlin Ilkkaracan became active in a number of movements and organisations, including feminist NGOs and worked for four years at a women's shelter. She also received a PhD in psychology from the Freie Universitat Berlin. She took part in the ultimately successful international campaign to recognise women's rights as human rights at the 1993 UN Human Right Conference in Vienna. Ilkkaracan remembers how women's organisations managed to mobilise 5,000 women from all over the world at a time when the internet was still largely unknown.

At the end of 1994 Ilkkaracan returned to Turkey and founded [Women for Women's Human Rights](#) (WWHR). It was a time when women for the first time questioned the prevailing Kemalist narrative on women's rights, says Ilkkaracan. "There was this big myth that Mustafa Kemal and his friends had given women their rights and nothing more needed to be done," she told ESI.

Yet a lot more had to be done, Ilkcaracan insists. To that end, WWHR has focused on initiating and coordinating national campaigns in favour of legal reforms in areas like gender equality and domestic violence. It has also promoted women's rights at the international level. Since 2005 WWHR has had consultative status at the [United Nations Economic & Social Council \(ECOSOC\)](#).

In Turkey, WWHR focused first on amending the civil code. Ilkcaracan recalls: "Until 2001, the husband was still the head of the family, according to the civil code. Everything was the husband's decision." Ilkcaracan initiated a nationwide campaign for a new penal code. Although this was not on the agenda of the newly elected AKP government, the women's movement succeeded, and in September 2004 a new penal code was adopted. (In her paper, [Reforming the Penal Code in Turkey](#) (2007), Ilkcaracan describes the campaign.) Today, she believes that the position of women in Turkey is deteriorating once again as Turkish society becomes more conservative, a point she also made in [a November 2011 interview with the Open Democracy](#) online publication.

In 2001, Ilkcaracan was one of the initiators of the [Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Countries](#) (CSBR), an international network of NGOs that fights against sexual oppression of women in Muslim societies. She has also been active in the [UN Commission in the Status of Women](#) – at times as a member of the Turkish delegation and at other times as an independent expert.

Ilkcaracan has authored many articles and books on violence against women, women in Muslim societies and notions of sexuality. These include the books [Deconstructing Sexuality in the Middle East](#) (2008) and [Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies](#) (2000). She has won several awards, including the [International Gruber Award for Women's Rights](#). In 2011 she was working on a PhD in political science and international relations at the Bogazici University in Istanbul.

In her interview with ESI, Ilkcaracan recalls her experience with WWHR, the campaigns for the new civil and penal codes, the resistance she faced from the AKP government, and the current situation of women in Turkey.