

# Hotel fire in Turkey: A preventable massacre

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At least 76 people were tragically killed and 51 injured in a fire at the Grand Kartal Hotel in Bolu's Kartalkaya ski resort in Turkey on Tuesday. According to reports, the fire broke out after midnight while most of the guests were asleep and not even a fire alarm was sounded. The 161-room hotel reportedly had 238 guests and an unspecified number of staff in the hotel that night due to the half-term holidays.

While Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced that nine people had been arrested as a result of the prosecutor's investigation, no government official resigned over this preventable "social murder". President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared a day of "national mourning" for those who died in the fire and attempted to cover up his government's responsibility for the disaster by saying, "This is not a day for politics; it is a day for solidarity, unity and togetherness".

This disaster is an indictment of the entire ruling elite, including capitalist corporations and officials, who failed to take even the most basic safety precautions against fire and similar hazards for reasons of cost. Survivors' testimonies and expert statements show that the hotel had virtually no fire safety measures in place. Although ministers have stated that the hotel had a fire safety licence, experts stress that the lack of mandatory fire safety systems paved the way for the disaster.

Eyewitness accounts and videos of the incident show that there were serious security lapses at the hotel.

In an interview with Ekol TV, a guest staying at the hotel with his family said that no alarms sounded during the fire. "The only people who noticed the fire were those who saw the smoke and heard the noise. It was so dense inside that we could not see, we almost suffocated. We could not reach the fire escape, nor did we see any smoke detectors or fire extinguishers," he said, highlighting the lack of safety in the hotel.

According to those inside the hotel, the fire escapes

inside are also used for service purposes and the escape routes are inadequate. Videos taken by eyewitnesses show flames rising from more than one floor of the timber-covered building and the cries for help of people trapped inside. Some guests are said to have tried to climb down the windows by tying sheets together, while others jumped out in panic.

Interior Minister Yerlikaya said the first firefighters arrived 48 minutes after the emergency call. The delay in rescue, combined with inadequate fire safety measures at the hotel, led to an increase in the number of casualties.

According to eyewitnesses, in the first moments of the fire, people in the hotel had to start evacuation efforts by their own means. A hotel employee told BBC News Turkish that many people were rescued thanks to the help from the neighbouring hotel.

Even before the work of extinguishing the fire and identifying the victims had been completed, the authorities were in a race to absolve themselves of responsibility and direct public anger at various targets. Culture and Tourism Minister Mehmet Nuri Ersoy of Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Bolu Mayor Tanju Özcan of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) traded accusations.

In a statement after the fire, Ersoy said that the Grand Kartal Hotel had been inspected in 2021 and 2024, and that the business opening and operating licences and fire qualification documents had been checked, and that the hotel's fire qualification documents had been approved by the Bolu Municipality Fire Department. Ersoy claimed that regular inspections were the responsibility of the fire department.

Özcan reacted strongly to these statements, saying that the municipality had no authority over the hotel's fire safety and that the last such report was issued in 2007: "If the minister claims that there is a document on fire safety issued by the Bolu Municipality in 2023

or 2024, let him show it. We have no such document. The document issued in 2007 is a report issued 12 years before I took office, during the term of an AKP mayor. No approval was given after that date.”

Özcan said the hotel was in a tourism area under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and that the municipality had no authority to carry out fire inspections. However, *Evrensel* reported that the hotel’s general assembly reports from previous years showed that Resmîye Kahruman, the auditor and financial adviser of the company that runs the hotel, is also a CHP councillor in Bolu Municipality.

On the X platform, *Gazete Duvar* writer Bahadır Özgür pointed to the problem of the lack of supervision behind the fire tragedy, saying that the powers of the fire brigade have been systematically reduced over the years. According to Özgür, an amendment to the fire regulations 13 years ago abolished the fire brigade’s inspection powers, in line with the demands of the construction lobby.

Reminding people that experts on the subject made serious warnings at the time, Özgür emphasised that the lack of supervision invited possible disasters. Recalling the entertainment centre fire in Beşiktaş, Özgür stressed that these incidents were evident and that the competent authorities had failed to fulfil their responsibilities.

The Bolu Provincial Coordination Committee of the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) also pointed out that the hotel did not have an automatic sprinkler system, which should have been installed in 2008, and stated that the fire spread rapidly and the loss of life increased as a result.

Emphasising that such disasters can be prevented through scientific and technical measures, the statement blamed the disaster on inadequate supervision and companies putting profit before human life. It was also stressed that the lack of regular maintenance and inspections, the lack of technical personnel and the lack of regular inspections of fire safety equipment increased the scale of the disaster.

The fire in Bolu took place only 10 months after another fire in Istanbul that killed 29 people and almost two years after the earthquake in Turkey and Syria that officially killed 63,000 people. While today, as in the past, the authorities try to evade responsibility and

deflect social anger by blaming each other or calling for “unity and solidarity”, what is certain is the growing indifference of the ruling class to such mass loss of life.

The fact that the necessary precautions have not been taken for years in a 12-storey timber tourist building where thousands of people stay every year, that this has been ignored and that this situation is not exceptional but extremely common, is an indictment of the capitalist system based on the accumulation of profit and wealth and of the entire bourgeois political establishment.

To prevent such disasters, the irrational system that has led to them must be ended and replaced by a global socialist economy that prioritises the safety and welfare of society, protecting human life, not profit.



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