

Via fax to: (+90 312) 525 58 31

Via email to: contact@tccb.gov.tr

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanı
(President of the Republic of Turkey)
Cumhurbaşkanlığı Külliyesi
06560 Beştepe,
Ankara, Turkey

January 21, 2016

Re: Concern for Turkish scholars & universities

Your Excellency:

We are a coalition of organizations concerned with promoting high quality higher education and research collaboration. We include within our members and partners many institutions and individuals from or within Turkey, and we deeply value our collective and mutually beneficial history of working with the Turkish higher education and research sector.

We are therefore dismayed to have to write now and express our grave concern about recent reports of widespread pressures on members of the Turkish higher education and research community, including investigations, arrests, interrogations, suspensions and termination of positions, in apparent violation of internationally recognized principles of academic freedom, free expression and freedom of association; principles on which quality higher education and research depend.

Specifically, we understand that Turkish federal prosecutors have placed approximately 1,128 professors and researchers at 89 Turkish institutions under investigation, apparently for their having co-signed a public statement urging Turkish authorities to renew dialogue efforts with factions in the southeastern area of the country. We understand that some of the signatories have already been investigated for and/or charged with criminal offenses including spreading “terrorist propaganda,” “inciting people to hatred, violence and breaking the law,” and “insulting Turkish institutions and the Turkish Republic,” and that dozens of scholars have been taken into custody, detained and interrogated. We have also received reports that a number of scholars have already been terminated, suspended or forced to resign from their positions within Turkish universities.

We would welcome any additional or contrary information you might share that will help us to understand the situation more fully. Absent this, the facts as described suggest a serious and widespread effort to retaliate against scholars for the nonviolent, public expression of their views on matters of professional and public concern – conduct expressly protected by internationally recognized standards of academic freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of association as

articulated in, among others, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Turkey is a signatory.

Absent any clearly legitimate, publicly expressed grounds for doing so—which frankly we find difficult to imagine—the legal, administrative and professional actions reportedly taken against these scholars raise serious concerns not only for their professional and personal well-being, but for the overall well-being of the Turkish higher education and research community, and for the ability of intellectuals and institutions in Turkey to undertake world-class scholarship. We find this suggestion deeply distressing given the important role that Turkey, Turkish universities and Turkish scholars have historically played and that we hope they will continue to play in the development and international exchange of knowledge in the 21st century.

We therefore implore you to intervene in these matters before any further harm is done to the scholars, their institutions, and to the reputation of Turkey’s higher education and research sector, including by:

- publicly reaffirming Turkey’s commitment to the essential values of higher education and research, including academic freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of association;
- ensuring due protection for the well-being of the scholars concerned and for the principles of academic freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of association;
- directing, through all appropriate means available to your office, responsible authorities or officials to cease and dismiss any investigations, prosecutions, detentions, or legal, administrative or professional actions undertaken against the scholars concerned which are based on their nonviolent expression of views on matters of professional and public concern;
- undertaking to ensure the timely release and reinstatement of any scholars who have been detained, terminated, suspended, forced to resign their positions or otherwise disadvantaged as a result of such actions; and
- until such time as these steps can be effectuated, to ensure that any proceedings against the scholars concerned proceed in a manner consistent with Turkey’s obligations under domestic and international law, including internationally recognized standards of due process, fair trial, academic freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of association, and to ensure the scholars’ well-being and access to counsel and family while in custody.

We appreciate your most urgent attention to this matter and look forward to your earliest reply to Robert Quinn at scholarsatrisk@nyu.edu on behalf of the signatories.

Sincerely,

The undersigned organizations

Endorsing organizations as of January 21:



Academic Cooperation Association



American Political Science Association



Association of International Education Administrators



Canadian Association of University Teachers



Committee of Concerned Scientists



Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland



European University Association



Foundation for Refugee Students



International Council for Science's Committee on Freedom and Responsibility in the conduct of Science



Magna Charta Observatory



Mexican Association of International Education



Middle East Studies Association



National Tertiary Education Union, Australia



Scholars at Risk Network



Scholars at Risk Norway Section



The New Zealand Tertiary Education Union
Te Hautu Kahurangi o Aotearoa Incorporated

Additional endorsing organizations:



Alexander von Humboldt
Stiftung/Foundation

Alexander von Humboldt Foundation



ADVANCING SCIENCE, SERVING SOCIETY

American Association for
the Advancement of Science



American Philosophical Association



American Sociological Association



Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin
für Sozialforschung

Berlin Social Science Center



British Philosophical Association

The British Philosophical Association



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL DIFFERENCE
Columbia University's Center for
the Study of Social Difference



Council for European Studies



Council for the Development of
Social Science Research in Africa



Köpfe die Wissen schaffen

Deutscher Hochschulverband (DHV) - German Association of
University Professors and Lecturers



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service
German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)



German Society for Analytic Philosophy



International Development Ethics Association



University and College Union

cc:

Mr. Bekir Bozdağ

Minister of Justice
Republic of Turkey Ministry of Justice
06659 Kızılay
Ankara, Turkey
Fax: +90 312 419 3370
Email: info@adalet.gov.tr

Mr. Yekta Saraç

Higher Education Council President
Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı
Uluslararası İlişkiler Birimi
B-7 Blok, 5. Kat
06539 Bilkent

Ankara, Turkey

Fax: +90 312 266 4744

E-mail: cohe@yok.gov.tr

Mr. Nabi Avcı

Minister of National Education
Atatürk Bulvarı No: 98
06650 Bakanlıklar
Ankara, Turkey
Fax: +90 312 4188289

The Honorable Yaşar Halit Çevik

Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations
Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations
821 UN Plaza 10th Floor
New York, NY 10017 USA
Fax: 1-212 949 0086
Email: tr-delegation.newyork@mfa.gov.tr

(Continued on next page)

The Honorable Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
Email: InfoDesk@ohchr.org

The Honorable Kishore Singh

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
Email: sreducation@ohchr.org

The Honorable David Kaye

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland
Fax: +41 22 917 9006
Email: freedex@ohchr.org

The Honorable Federica Mogherini

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels
Belgium

The Honorable Thorbjørn Jagland

Secretary General of the Council of Europe
Council of Europe
Avenue de l'Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
France
Fax: + 33 (0)3 88 41 27 99

The Honorable Philippe Boilat

Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law
Council of Europe
Avenue de l'Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
France
Fax: + 33 (0)3 88 41 27 99

The Honorable John Kerry

United States Secretary of State
Office of Foreign Missions
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520 USA
Email: OFMInfo@state.gov

The Honorable Samantha Power

U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations
U.S. Permanent Mission to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017 USA

The Honorable John Bass

Ambassador of the United States to the Republic of Turkey
Embassy of the United States
110 Atatürk Blvd. Kavaklıdere, 06100
Ankara, Turkey
Fax: +90 312 467 0019

The Honorable Serdar Kılıç

Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the United States
Embassy of the Republic of Turkey
2525 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20008 USA
Fax: +1 202 612 6744
Email: embassy.washingtondc@mfa.gov.tr

The Honorable Stéphane Dion

Minister of Foreign Affairs
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0G2
Canada
Fax: +1 613 996 9709

The Honorable Selçuk Unal

Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to Canada
Turkish Embassy in Ottawa
197 Wurtemberg Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 8L9
Canada
Fax: + 1 613 244 2491
Email: embassy.ottawa@mfa.gov.tr