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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:



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

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