

Middle East Studies Association ~ Letters On Turkey

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu

Office of the Prime Minister

Başbakanlık 06573

Ankara, Turkey

Via facsimile +90 312 417 0476

Dear Prime Minister Davutoğlu:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) of North America and its Committee on Academic Freedom to underscore for the third time our deep concern over the disciplinary investigations and criminal prosecutions that have been undertaken against scholars who signed a petition for peace in the Kurdish regions of the country ("Peace Petition"). In our previous letters on this matter, dated January 14, 2016 and February 22, 2016, we wrote in response to the immediate aftermath of a government-initiated campaign of intimidation triggered by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's speech describing the signatories as "so-called academics" and "traitors," and the broad pattern of persecution that subsequently emerged, encompassing suspensions and terminations of academics from positions at universities, detention and interrogation of faculty members by over-zealous prosecutors, and a spate of threats and attacks against academic signatories by vigilante actors. We now write in response to the disturbing degeneration of the situation in the three weeks since we last wrote. The violations of academic freedom in Turkey now include the pre-textual use of antiterrorism laws to arrest academics, the trampling of separation of powers and basic rule of law requirements to enable the executive to manage a campaign of prosecutions against petition signatories, and new proposals to further broaden terrorism laws to encompass the protected activities of academics, journalists, politicians and NGO advocates. Taken together, the events of the last few weeks, and especially the developments on March 15, 2016, signal that your government is willing to eviscerate basic human rights protections to punish critics of your policies towards the Kurdish community in Turkey.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the International Journal of Middle East Studies and has nearly 3000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere. The detention, interrogation and arrest of academics Esra Mungan, Kıvanç Ersoy and Muzaffer Kaya represent a new escalation of government action against signatories. Professors Mungan, Ersoy and Kaya were singled out for prosecution (together with a fourth academic, Meral Camcı, who has so far avoided interrogation and arrest by virtue of being out of the country) because of a meeting they conducted on March 10, 2016 at which they reiterated their call for peace on behalf of the Academics for Peace/Istanbul, a subset of the signatories of the original petition. In response, the prosecutor's office detained the three professors, interrogated them and immediately issued arrest warrants against them, taking them into custody on charges of supporting terrorism. The theory the government appears to rely on is that the peace petition signatories acted in coordination with the PKK because an individual associated with that organization, Bese Hozat, had earlier called for intellectuals to support Kurdish self-governance. This spurious allegation has no basis. The claim that a petition calling for the government to desist from military action in the Kurdish provinces and resume a peace process amounts to support for terrorism represents a staggering threat to freedom of expression and academic freedom in Turkey. By the government's logic, any speech, research, writing, opinion, organizing or demonstration supportive of Kurdish rights may be conflated with support for terrorism.

Read more: <http://mesana.org/letters-turkey>