

## **Academics For Peace**

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After the June 2015 Elections and the collapse of peace process in Turkey, the government, in the name of “fighting with terrorism” and “[fighting with the trenches](#)” dug by the YDG-H (the youngsters of PKK) has declared 58 curfews in the Kurdish inhabited neighborhoods in the South East. However, these open-ended curfews (many of them lasting for weeks) and the practices by the government special forces have put civilian lives in danger. According to the [Human Rights Foundation](#) of Turkey “fundamental rights of people such as Right to Life and Right to Health are being violated and 162 civilians (29 women, 32 children, 24 people over the age 60) lost their lives”

Under the curfews, thousands of people have had to flee their homes, those who didn't have the means and haven't been able to do so, were not able to find food for weeks, had to bear the cost of war hiding at home [while their homes were targeted](#) during the clashes. Under these attacks, many civilians were shot dead and it was even impossible to [bury their dead](#). Still, while the curfew is now going on for more than a month, those who tried to go out and were shot dead are lying on the streets. People are unable to claim the [dead bodies of their relatives](#). According to the report published by [Amnesty International](#), the inhabitants of the regions under curfew were unable to safely leave their neighbourhoods to access medical care . In some instances ambulances were also denied access by the security services. During curfews we have also witnessed the pictures and videos of many abuses by the government forces such as those who dragged the dead Kurdish militants through the streets [tied by the neck](#) to an armoured police vehicle or those who have written [racist graffiti messages](#) on the walls of the neighbourhoods. Even if the government condemned some of these abuses later on, those responsible were not yet prosecuted.

On 11th of January, as academics and intellectuals of Turkey we wanted to raise our voice to this human rights abuses that were also documented by many national and international human rights institutions and issued a statement called “ [we will not be a party to this crime](#)” . The strictly non-partisan declaration was demanding the government to end the curfews that violate its citizens’ right to life, liberty, and security, condemn those responsible for the human rights abuses and to return to the peace process. We have also stated that what is now going on in the southeast region is a clear cut breach of the Turkish constitution and international law to which Turkey is a party and government should abide. The main motivation behind the statement was peace and nothing more. Our declaration has been supported by 1128 academics from Turkey and 356 international intellectuals including Noam Chomsky, Judith Butler, Etienne Balibar David Harvey, Immanuel Wallerstein and Slavoj Zizek.

As academics who are currently working for prestigious universities and research centers in Turkey and around the world, it is our duty to inform the government and the citizens about what is happening in the region and why these practices are not acceptable. We are bounded by this intellectual responsibility.

Right after the statement, on the 12th of January president Erdogan, instead of focusing on the [latest attack](#) in Sultanahmet [have targeted](#) the signatory academics by purposely framing our “demand for peace” as a “support for terror” calling us “traitors, ignorants, colonialists and so-called intellectuals”. He not only accused the signatories of not knowing the facts in the region but also called all state institutions to take action. Not surprisingly, his demonizing was immediately [followed by YOK](#) (the Council of Higher Education) that stated that appropriate measures would be taken for these academics who supported terror. Moreover, the mafia boss Sedat Peker, known for organized crime and his ultra nationalist statements also [threatened academics](#) by saying “their their blood will be spilled”. For those who have seen [his pictures](#) in the media with the president, this statement came as no surprise. Framing this peaceful declaration as “siding with terror” was also evident in [PM Davutoglu’s speech](#) that criticised the statement as one sided.

Targeting signatory academics continued in the following days. The declaration written by Academics for Peace was the main topic of the president Erdogan's public speeches in the later days. He was not only accusing us of being the collaborators of the PKK and linked our declaration with the PKK attacks but also called the legal institutions in action over and over. On 16th of January, Bekir Bozdag, the minister of Justice also argued that the declaration itself has been drafted by the PKK. Their arguments was made on the basis that this declaration is only calling the government into action but not the armed group.

As one of the signatory of the declaration, and a political scientist by training, I strongly believe that it is the government that is bound by the law and not the armed group. Armed groups are illegal by nature anyway but the governments take their legitimacy from the law itself and as citizens of Turkey, it is our duty to call the government in action when there is a clear cut breach of the constitution. Declaring curfews in the region without taking appropriate measures is a breach of the constitution. While fighting the PKK, the governments should ensure the right of life of its citizens whether or not this right is breached by the government officials or the rebel group. The PKK attacks also show government's vulnerability as it proves that it has failed to deal with the problem. As citizens of Turkey we are paying taxes to the government, represented by the government and not by the rebel group. Therefore it is the government that should be the addressee of this statement.

Moreover, in terms of returning to the peace process, it is still the government and not the armed group that decide to start a peace process as we have seen in many other civil war contexts around the world. As the civil wars are asymmetrical by nature and its very rare that a rebel group can actually win a war, they fight to the point that the government takes them as a negotiation partner. Sooner or later the governments do because there is no military solution to civil wars. Even if the armed groups fall, because the underlying grievances are not yet resolved, they go underground and re-emerge at a later date and the violence never stops. There are volumes of books and

academic articles about civil wars and comparative peace processes that prove this point. Therefore, we wanted that the government takes the initiative and starts the peace process right now rather than later when the number of casualties will be higher. That is exactly why we have taken the government as the sole addressee of this statement.

While the president's speeches on academics attracted media attention, their reflection on the daily life of academics was worse and has not been covered in the international media appropriately. The universities that should be the center of the free speech started a witch hunt. In the first instance, universities such as Bahcesehir, Hacettepe, Hakkari, Duzce, Tunceli, Abdullah Gul, Pamukkale Universities have issued statements labelling our arguments about the existence of human rights abuses that are also well documented by [Human Rights Watch](#) as "imaginary" and our declaration as "support for the terror"

Moreover, many universities have started [investigations](#) of the signatory academics. Many of our colleagues are now in the position of losing their jobs. Many academics including but not limited to Hülya Doğan at Bartın University, Professor Ali Çeliksöz from Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Associate Professor Latife Akyüz from Duzce University faced academic investigations and some of them have already been forced to resign. Further disciplinary investigations are been taken by [Ondokuz Mayıs University](#), Akdeniz University, Abant Izzet Baysal University and Hacettepe University. The number of universities that start investigations or fire the signatory academics increases day by day.

Several [public prosecutors](#) also launched investigations for academics that work at the universities under their authorization. Some of our colleagues have been "invited" to the General Directorate of Security to give their [testimonials](#). Today [Istanbul Chief Public](#) Prosecutor's Office also launched an investigation into all signatory academic under the article 301 of Turkish Penal Code and article 7 of the Anti-Terror Law the accusations range from "making terrorist propaganda" and "inciting people to

violence” to “insulting the Turkish Republic,” If found guilty, we could face between one to five years in prison.

On 15<sup>th</sup> of January several of our colleagues have been taken into custody in early morning raids on their home and their offices. Many of them were from [Kocaeli University](#) but we have also witnessed many cases from Van Yuzuncu Yil University, Abant Izzet Baysal University, Uludag University. Only after many hours of investigation that they could finally be [released](#).

The university administrations or the public prosecutors are not the only ones who would like to punish the signatories. The “pool media”, the media channels and newspapers that represent the government interests and heavily do the government 's propaganda, have published our names and targeted us. On 12 of January we were on the headlines of the Yeni Safak newspaper as “PKK collaborators” , the following day we were targeted as the “state enemies” for recognising the Armenian Genocide and supporting the Gezi protests previously. Some of their columnists even accused us of the Sultan Ahmet bombing that IS committed on the 12th of June.

We have also witnessed that the pictures of our colleagues have been spread out by the nationalist students as PKK supporters. Their doors have been crossed, insulting petitions have been stuck attached. The death threats by the nationalists still continue on Facebook and Twitter, many Facebook accounts publish our pictures as PKK supporters. Our web page has been hacked by an ultra-nationalist group. The latest [attack of PKK](#) on 13th of January also worsened the situation. None of us have supported any kind of violence in our entire life but because we have been portrayed as such by the president, the hashtag [#1128killers](#) became a trending topic accusing us of being supporters of these attacks. We also receive abusive and insulting e-mails from unknown people asking us to apologize as if we have committed a crime. No wonder some of our colleagues have also experienced death threats.

As academic for peace, to address these targeting campaigns we have issued a [second statement](#) and declared that we will stand by our declaration and our colleagues that

are charged, we will start the necessary legal processes for those who target us and we will continue to be against any kind of human rights abuses in Turkey. The declaration was also an immediate call the government to end the curfews, to start the peace process and to the citizens of Turkey to reject the war.

However, due to on going targeting campaigns, we are afraid. Those who are in Turkey are already facing serious challenges from ultra-nationalists, their universities and public prosecutors. For people who work in international institutions like me the situation is no better. We have to give our testimony otherwise we will be taken into custody upon our arrival to Turkey. But we do not know whether or not if we go to Turkey, we will not be detained or they will not issue an international travel ban as it was the case of Turkish scholar [Haydar Darici](#) who works at the Michigan University. It is practically impossible for the ex-pat academics to go back to Turkey for the testimony as they may never come back to their work.

Some of our colleagues already removed their signatures out of fear even if they still express their solidarity with us. On the other hand, we also received support from those who haven't done so at the beginning. So far we have reached more than [2000 academic signatures](#) and we keep receiving more. Not only academics but also [journalists](#), [Pshycologists](#), [Litterateurs](#), Education Union, Progressive Lawyers Association and [Students](#) gave support to our declaration and also to our freedom of speech. Among our international supporters Noam Chomsky, in an email addressed to [the Guardian](#) stated that "If I decide to go to Turkey it will not be on his (The president Erdogan) invitation, but as frequently before at the invitation of the many courageous dissidents, including Kurds who have been under severe attack for many years." [Judith Butler](#), on the other hand expressed her concern by saying "The coupling of censorship and military control is a great danger to democracy."

US Ambassador to Turkey, John Bass, on [Twitter](#) expressed his concerns about the harsh treatments towards academics and reminded the importance of the freedom of expression. His statement received criticism from the Ankara Mayor Melih Gokcek

who has suggested that the ambassador [should return to his country](#). His statement is followed on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January by [John Kirby](#), the US State department spokesman who said, “Official bodies, law enforcement, and judicial authorities are being used to discourage legitimate political discourse”. The [opposition parties](#) in Turkey CHP and HDP also released statements that these unlawful investigations should be ended.

While the human rights abuses are already documented, stating them openly, asking the government to prosecute those who have committed them and to start the peace process is now putting our jobs and even our lives in danger. As stated by [Emma Sinclair-Webb](#) from Human Rights Watch. “There are concerns for the physical safety of some academics in provincial universities after being targeted in such a way.” As academics for peace, we are now dealing with the death threats, the legal processes and the disciplinary investigations of our colleagues but this does not leave us any time for anything else. We are also responsible for our students and for our research. All we want is peace for our country where saying “don’t kill people” should not be considered as a crime, and also peace for ourselves.