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The Honorable Abdulhamit Gul
Minister of Justice
Republic of Turkey
Ministry of Justice
06659 Kizilay
Ankara, Turkey

CC: See final page

Open letter - Re: Sweeping actions against higher education professionals in Turkey

Dec. 7, 2017

Your Excellencies:

I write to express ongoing, grave concern about a large number of scholars in Turkey who face criminal charges solely as a result of the nonviolent expression of ideas; specifically having signed a petition in January 2016 (the so-called "Peace Petition"), criticizing government policy in the southeast of the country. As several of these scholars' trials are scheduled to begin this week, I urge you to take any action practicable to reverse the dangerous and destructive course of the past two years, by dismissing the charges against these scholars and ensuring full protection within Turkey of human rights, including due process, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and academic freedom.

The German Rectors' Conference (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz / HRK) is the umbrella organization of public and government-recognised universities in Germany. The HRK brings together all major German universities and universities of applied sciences as well as colleges of art and music. A large number of the HRK's 268 member institutions have strong ties to partner universities in Turkey. We value the long-standing German-Turkish partnership in the fields of science, research, and exchange.

However, my understanding of universities as places where ideas can be formulated and challenged without the fear of any negative repercussions obliges me to

intervene on behalf of the signatories of the "Peace Petition." The freedom of speech, the freedom of thought, and the freedom of research are the foundations on which modern universities rest. I strongly believe that safeguarding academic freedom and the protection of human rights are the absolute preconditions for international cooperation. Without these a fruitful partnership between Turkey and Germany will be difficult to maintain.

As Scholars at Risk, HRK, and others have noted previously, the mass actions taken by Turkish authorities against the Peace Petition signatories, among others, appear to be based solely on their nonviolent expression of an opinion on a matter of legitimate academic and public concern. I was therefore dismayed to learn that, on September 23, Turkey began issuing indictments against Peace Petition signatories, charging them with "propagandizing for a terrorist organization," a crime that carries a sentence of up to seven-and-a-half years in prison.

The ongoing prosecution of these scholars remains a grave violation of Turkey's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and related instruments and standards. Not only do these actions strip the individuals of their rights to academic freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of association; they also threaten to do irreparable harm to Turkey's higher education sector, and to its democracy.

I therefore respectfully urge you to prevent any further harm to the scholars, their institutions, and to the reputation of Turkey's higher education and research sector.

I appreciate your most urgent attention to this matter and look forward to your earliest reply.

Sincerely,



Professor Dr. Horst Hippler

CC:

- President of the Higher Education Council of Turkey
- Minister of National Education of Turkey
- Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education
- United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression
- High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
- Secretary General of the Council of Europe
- Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe
- Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law of the Council of Europe
- Secretary of State of the United States of America, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations
- Ambassador of the United States to the Republic of Turkey
- Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the United States
- Scholars at Risk