



Nabi Avcı
BAKAN

Robert Quinn

Scholars at Risk Network

CC: Endorsing Organizations

March 3, 2016

RE: Concern for Turkish Scholars & Universities

Dear Mr. Quinn,

I have received your letter expressing your concern about “recent reports of widespread pressures on members of the Turkish higher education and research community” after some academics and graduate students at 89 Turkish universities have co-signed a public statement about what has been happening in the southeastern Turkey. As an academic myself, I fully agree with you that academics should not be put under pressure for their opinions. Nonetheless, I am also truly sorry to learn that you have incomplete information about the aforementioned public statement and the official reactions given to it. Therefore, as you have also asked, I would like to share some background information to help you to understand the situation more fully.

While academics are universally responsible to make reasonable, impartial and peaceful statements on any social and political conflicts, those academics who signed the aforementioned public statement make a bad situation even worse by falsely accusing Turkish government of a “planned massacre.” The simple fact is that Turkish security forces are fighting against the PKK—recognized as a terrorist organization by the United States, European Union, and NATO. The PKK terrorists have dug large ditches and filled them with bombs in streets of urban areas. They have also attacked schools when there are children



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around. As of March 03, 2016, they attacked to a total of 147 schools in four provinces, including 56 schools in Şırnak, 25 schools in Diyarbakır, 71 schools in Mardin, and five schools in Muş. As you can see from the pictures attached, PKK terrorists burned these schools and thus deprived children of basic rights to education.

Under such conditions, the security forces started operations against these terrorists and imposed curfews in some parts of several towns to protect civilians. Moreover, while the public statement asks the government to take its security forces back and terminate the curfews, it says nothing to the terrorist organization and its attacks on civilians and schools. While your letter describes the public statement as “urging Turkish authorities to renew dialogue efforts with factions in the southeast area of the country,” in reality the statement has been understood as an obvious attack at the Turkish government and legitimization of what the PKK terrorists have been doing in the region. Turkish public at large, accordingly, reacted firmly against the statement.

I would also like to remind you that Turkey is a democratic country and its adherence to the rule of law is very strong. Moreover, the Turkish Constitution and laws guarantee university autonomy and academic freedom in Turkey. Academics have been freely conducting research on any political topic, including southeastern Turkey, and criticized the government’s actions without being subjected to any censorship or discipline for years. The current investigation on the aforementioned statement and its signatories is, therefore, not related to restricting academic freedom or freedom of expression. Rather, Turkish Council of Higher Education and universities—which are fully autonomous from the government according to the Constitution— started investigation on the aforementioned public statement and its signatories due to the public outcry it created as well as its alleged criminal offences including making “terrorist propaganda.” On the other hand, the judiciaries—who are also fully independent from the government according to the Constitution—are investigating the statement as well as some of its signatories. While I cannot comment on a legal matter, I nonetheless would like to ensure you that any proceedings against the academics concerned



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continue 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.

Finally, without any hesitation, I would like to reaffirm Turkey's commitment to academic freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of association—all of which are under protection of our Constitution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nabi Avcı", written in a cursive style.

Nabi Avcı
Minister of National Education, Turkey







SIRNAK - MERKEZ

SEMA CINGILLIOĞLU
İLKOKULU





GÖRSEL
SANATLAR



