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The Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association (OTSA, formerly the Turkish Studies Association or TSA) writes to express our concern and dismay over the recent treatment of academics in Turkey who are calling for peace within the country. We do not need to inform you of their petition of January 10, 2016, or the subsequent persecution of those who signed it. Calling for peace can never be a crime, and freedom of expression is a human right. Those of us who work diligently for a deeper understanding of Turkey and its history on the international scene, the over 400 members of OTSA and others who are not members, find our work undercut and betrayed by the denial of academic freedom to our Turkish colleagues critical of government actions, and especially by the criminalization of 1128 Turkish academics who petitioned on behalf of peace.

The issue of the Kurdish region, which was the topic of the petition, has been a contentious one throughout the history of the Republic of Turkey and before. As scholars of Turkish society and history, we are aware that this has been and is a highly complex and constantly changing situation with many possibilities, and it is precisely the job of academics and professors to explore and understand all such possibilities, and to make recommendations they deem likely to be useful. When those academics are punished and persecuted for expressing their views, whether by the government, the educational hierarchy, or the public, all of academia is threatened. Labeling those professors “traitors” and “terrorists” strikes at the heart of the entire educational enterprise worldwide.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, all of which Turkey and other nations have signed, Turkey is required to protect freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of thought. Turkey’s own Constitution also guarantees these rights in Articles 25, 26, and 27. A functioning democracy demands the toleration of dissent and the protection of human rights. The government of the Republic of Turkey has a responsibility to enforce those rights.

In recent years, Turkey’s violations of human rights have become notorious in the international media and have generated numerous letters of protest. We therefore urge your government now to ensure that investigations, criminal charges, and disciplinary measures, whether carried out by the Yüksek Öđretim Kurulu, the İstanbul Public Prosecution Office, or

any other body, be halted and dropped. Such action would go a long way toward countering Turkey's growing international reputation as a place where civil liberties and democratic rights are endangered.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. We look forward to your positive response.

Cordially,

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