

Letter to the embassies in Turkey

His/Her Excellency,

We, the Academics for Peace (Barış İçin Akademisyenler, BAK) are writing to you to draw your attention to the first court hearing in the case against four of our colleagues, Ass. Prof. Esra Mungan Gürsoy, Ass. Prof. Meral Camcı, Assoc. Prof. Kıvanç Ersoy and Ass. Prof. Muzaffer Kaya, which will take place on 22nd April, 2016 in İstanbul, Çağlayan Courthouse, at 2:00 PM.

Since 15th March and 31st March, 2016 respectively, the four have been held as pre-trial detainees, accused of "making propaganda of the terrorist organization PKK/KCK" under Article 7/2 of Anti-Terror Law. The indictment refers to a press statement which the four read out on 10th March 2016 and the original petition "We will not be a party to this crime", which was signed by 1128 individuals and made public on 11th January, 2016.

Following the petition, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has repeatedly targeted the signees as "a gang who name themselves as academicians", "so-called intellectuals", arguing that "the people who talk like the members of terrorist organizations are just the same as the members of terrorist organizations". Most recently, referring to this trial, he publically declared that our colleagues should "remain in prison throughout the trial" as they were "guilty".

Over the past months, his words have triggered a lynch campaign in local and national-wide mainstream and social media presenting a serious general and personal threat to the physical integrity of the signees, disciplinary instigations in a majority of the universities, dismissals and forced resignations, as well as detentions, house searches, and legal prosecutions against the whole group of signees. As an initial reaction, nearly one thousand more academics joined in signing the declaration, hence, now, the total number of signatories amounts to 2212.

The press statement read out by Esra Mungan Gürsoy, Muzaffer Kaya, Kıvanç Ersoy and Meral Camci on 10th March, 2016 was issued by BAK İstanbul to inform the public about precisely this unjust treatment against the signees of the original petition, especially about the administrative investigations and prosecutions. As a result, these four have been detained and an indictment has been prepared for them, while the investigations against the rest of the academics are progressively continuing. The indictment has been approved by the İstanbul 13th Heavy Penalty Court and the first hearing of the trial will be held on 22nd April, 2016. The accusation requires an imprisonment from 1,5 years to 7,5 years.

This trial is a clear breach of freedom of expression, and should not just be regarded as a case against the academics, but rather a trial against freedom of expression in the whole of Turkey. It should be noted that Turkey is already placed at the top with 300 applications to the ECtHR regarding violation of freedom of expression.

Hence, we would like to kindly invite you to be present at the court on the 22nd April, 2016, to observe the first hearing. We believe that your presence will not only give a strong sign of support for peace, democracy, and freedom of expression in Turkey, but will also have a positive effect on the fairness of the trial of our colleagues.

If you have any further question, please do not hesitate to contact us at any point in time.
Thank you in advance for your kind interest,

Yours Sincerely,