



Defending academic and medical independence in Turkey

Alexis Benos, Chiara Bordini, Hannah Cowan, David McCoy, Penelope Milsom and David Sanders

We write on behalf of 207 health professionals, academics, and researchers, and 25 health and human rights organisations from many countries (appendix). We wish to bring to the attention of *The Lancet's* readers alarming events taking place in Turkey, where the state has been waging a campaign of terror and punishment against thousands of health professionals and academics.

Following the coup attempt on July 15, 2016, the Turkish Government imposed various measures as part of a temporary state of emergency. However, these measures have been extended to undermine civil liberties and democracy. Among other actions, tens of thousands of public servants have been dismissed without explanation or due process.¹ There have also been 63 blanket curfews imposed on towns such as Cizre, Silvan, and Sur, affecting over 1.8 million people.²

As part of this crackdown, 463 academics have been dismissed (11 of them have been recently suspended from their work, which is often a precursor to dismissal),³ for having signed a declaration for peace under the banner of "Academics for Peace". Notably, this declaration was made in January, 2016, several months before the attempted coup. Many of the 463 dismissed academics have been banned from travelling via the cancellation of their passports. Among those previously dismissed and recently suspended are a number of academic physicians who are all highly respected doctors with international reputations. Additionally, many medical international non-governmental organisations have been banned from working in Turkey.

The Turkish Medical Association has called on all parties to protect the professional autonomy of health-care workers to provide health care, respect their professional autonomy, obey liabilities originating from international legislation, investigate any violations urgently, and identify violators.⁴

The attack by the Turkish state on academic freedom and freedom of speech is part of a wider attack on democracy that has been documented by Amnesty International.⁵ However, these developments cannot be viewed simply as a national problem. They are also part of a worrying trend towards authoritarianism in several parts of the world.

The international academic community cannot stay silent. We must react strongly by expressing our disapproval to the Government and universities of Turkey, requesting the immediate reinstatement and standing in solidarity with our colleagues and fellow professionals who have lost their jobs, as well as insisting that restitution of civil rights is a prerequisite for the right to health.

1. European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission). Turkey— opinion on emergency decree laws nos. 667–676 adopted following the failed coup of 15 July 2016, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 109th Plenary Session, 9-10 December 2016. [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2016\)037-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2016)037-e) (accessed July 23, 2017).
2. Human Rights Foundation of Turkey. Curfews in Turkey between the dates 16 August 2015–1 June 2017. June 1, 2017. <http://en.tihv.org.tr/curfews-in-turkey-between-the-dates-16-august-2015-1-june-2017/> (accessed July 23, 2017).
3. 12 peace declaration signatory academics discharged from Dokuz Eylül University. *Bianet* (Istanbul). June 29, 2017/. <http://bianet.org/english/human-rights/187848-12-peace-declaration-signatory-academics-discharged-from-dokuz-eylul-university> (accessed July 23, 2017).
4. Vatanserver K, Tanık FA, Gökalp Ş, et al. Rapid assessment of health services In eastern and south-eastern Anatolia regions in the period of conflict starting from 20 July 2015. *Turkish Medical Association Publications* (Ankara). October, 2015. http://www.ttb.org.tr/kutuphane/g_rapor_en.pdf (accessed July 23, 2017).
5. Amnesty International. No end in sight: purged public sector workers denied a future in Turkey. May 22, 2017. <https://www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2017/05/No-End-In-Sight-ENG.pdf?x82182> (accessed July 23, 2017).