

UCU campaign briefing on academic freedom in Turkey

What is happening in Turkey?

In January 2016, 1128 academics published a '**Peace Petition**' which called on the Turkish government to end its military campaign in the country's south-east. President Erdogan denounced the signatories as 'terrorists', and those who signed the petition have been targeted with numerous **investigations, dismissals and prosecutions**.

The situation has deteriorated further following the attempted coup of 15 July 2016 and the subsequent declaration of a state of emergency. Since then, **over 9000 academic and administrative personnel** have been dismissed from their university posts, including nearly 400 'Peace Petition' signatories. Those dismissed by emergency decree are barred from getting jobs in other Turkish universities and are also denied access to pension, public housing and health care benefits. Many dismissed academics have also had their **passports cancelled**, effectively preventing them from seeking work outside the country.

Trade union members more generally have also been heavily targeted by the government. Our sister trade union in Turkey (Egitim-Sen) has seen **over 1500 of its members dismissed** and, in total, more than 100,000 public servants in Turkey have been dismissed or suspended by emergency decree. In the words of **Amnesty International**, 'Cutting 100,000 people off from access to work is akin to professional annihilation on a massive scale'.

In addition to the mass firings of public sector workers, **fifteen private universities** have been closed and hundreds of **academics and students detained** in the crackdown.

What has UCU been doing?

UCU has written repeatedly to the **Turkish government** and Council of Higher Education (YÖK) - similar to HEFCE in England - condemning their attacks on academic staff and education personnel, both **before** and **after** the attempted military coup.

UCU has called on the **UK government** to speak out about human rights abuses in Turkey and to suspend arms sales until international human rights standards are upheld.

We have **written to UK vice-chancellors** encouraging them to adopt a more critical position towards future collaborations with their institutional counterparts in Turkey.

In terms of practical solidarity, UCU has **supported online petitions**, participated in **solidarity missions** and donated to the **Education International (EI) appeal** in support of Egitim-Sen. We have also participated in **public events** and **conferences** on academic freedom and teacher trade unionism in Turkey.

A number of **UCU branches** and individual members have been involved in solidarity campaigns in defence of our colleagues in Turkey, either through their **departments** or their **subject associations**. However, we need to do more to support those colleagues and we need your help to do this.

What can branches do to help?

- Raise the issue of attacks on academics and education workers in Turkey **with your MP** and/or with the UK Foreign Secretary (Boris Johnson MP: **fcocorrespondence@fco.gov.uk**)
- Raise these issues within your institution and subject association
- Organise or join statements of support for Turkey's education workers and students
- Organise or join in with programmes and events on these issues
- Encourage your university to become part of **Cara's Universities Network**
- Encourage your institution to offer material support including temporary fellowships, scholarships or visiting lectureships, to higher education professionals and students from Turkey who have been targeted by the Turkish government
- **Donate to the EI appeal in support of Egitim-Sen.**

Next steps in the campaign

Given the scale of repression, **UCU Congress** in May called on the union to broaden its campaigning on Turkey. The Congress motion asks us to 'call on UK universities, colleges and other institutions to support persecuted academics and to freeze collaboration with Turkish universities taking action against academics'. It also calls on UCU to 'initiate a campaign of protest letters and emails to Turkish universities which have taken action against signatories of the 'Academics for Peace' petition.'

Academics for Peace (AfP-UK) is the solidarity organisation established in the UK to support the peace signatories who have been under attack in Turkey and beyond. In cooperation with their academic colleagues in Turkey, AfP have identified a number of higher education organisations in Turkey which have been responsible for taking action against academics, particularly the signatories of the peace petition. The key organisations include:

- The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (**TÜBİTAK**)
- The Council of Higher Education in Turkey (**YÖK**)

AfP have also identified approximately **115 universities in Turkey** which have been

involved in serious violations of academic freedom (e.g. encouraging staff or students to spy on and incriminate academics suspected of a critical stance towards the Turkish government).

As a result of these systematic attacks on academic freedom, AfP are calling for UK universities to take a tougher approach towards 'complicit universities' and higher education organisations in Turkey. Amongst other recommendations, the campaign calls for a moratorium on future collaborations with the Higher Education Council (YÖK) and the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK). **Further details about the AfP campaign are available here.**

UCU encourages local branches to work with AfP-UK members in their campaigns against violations of academic freedom in Turkey. For example, you may want to request an AfP speaker at a local UCU meeting. If so, the contact address is:

centre4democracy@gmail.com

Finally, AfP are not the only organisation campaigning on academic freedom and human rights in Turkey. Other key organisations include:

Cara (Council for At-Risk Academics)

CARA is a UK-based charity which helps academics in immediate danger, those forced into exile, and many who choose to remain in their home countries despite the serious risks they face. Over the past year the number of applications for support from **academics based in Turkey** has increased dramatically.

For further details of Cara's fellowship scheme click here.

Scholars at Risk

Scholars at Risk is the sister organisation to Cara. Based in the US, it has been active in campaigning for academic freedom in Turkey. **Their latest online appeal on Turkey is here.**

Education International (EI)

EI, the global union federation for education workers, has been at the forefront of the campaign to support our sister trade union, Egitim-Sen.

UCU is affiliated to EI and its European region, the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE).

For further details of ETUCE's work on Turkey click here.

Solidarity with the People of Turkey (SPOT)

SPOT is a solidarity campaign linking Turkish speaking communities living in the UK and the local trade unions. They have organised a number of solidarity missions to Turkey.

[For further details of the SPOT campaign, click here.](#)