

ACADEMICS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

NEWSLETTER OF THE "SUPPORTING ACADEMICS AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ACTOR IN A CHALLENGING CONTEXT" PROJECT

**ISSUE 1
APRIL 2018**

**ONGOING THREATS TO TURKEY'S
ACADEMICS FOR PEACE AND VIOLATION
OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER

Universities and academics in Turkey have been facing severe political pressure for more than two years now, posing a twofold challenge for the human rights movement in Turkey. First, the sweeping measures taken by state and higher education authorities involve a variety of human rights violations against members of the academic community, including imprisonment, prosecutions, undue treatment, dismissals and travel bans. Second, the oppression on academics undermines the intellectual and operational capacity of the human rights movement in Turkey, since many of these academics, especially those associated with the Academics for Peace (AfP), have been contributing to the human rights movement as researchers and educators.

The Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT) responds to this twofold challenge through an EC-funded project titled “Supporting academics as a human rights actor in a challenging context”.¹ The primary aim of the project is to support and empower academics who have been facing political, judicial and administrative pressures due to their work and statements as human rights defenders.²

Through its newsletter “Academics for Human Rights”, the Project aims to provide updated information on human rights violations against academics in Turkey and disseminate Project outcomes, raising awareness on both national and international scales to help strengthen solidarity for taking an effective stance against human rights violations in Turkey’s academia. This first Newsletter focuses on the “Peace Petition Affair”, the ongoing threats to Academics for Peace and resulting human rights violations from January 2016 to March 2018.

REPORTED RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST ACADEMICS FOR PEACE JANUARY 2016-MARCH 2018	
Disciplinary investigations	505
Disciplinary investigations. Decision of the investigation committee: dismissal from public service. Pending pending CoHE (YÖK) approval.	112
Preventive suspension	101
Suspension from administrative duty	7
Police custody	70
Pre-trial detention**	4
Removed and banned from public service by decree laws*	389
Dismissal	86
Resignation	42
Forced retirement	26
*Of the 389 signatories removed and banned from public service with the decree laws, 3 had their tenures in public institutions other than universities. 42 of them had been dismissed or forced into resignation earlier.	
**3 academics had to stay in pre-trial detention for 40 days and 1 for 22 days until they were released after the first court hearing. Their court case was opened under the Anti-terror Act Article 7/2 and is still continuing.	
Source: Prepared based on AfP (https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/node/314 , accessed on 27.02.2018) and own data prepared based on emergency decree laws (no.s 667-697).	

Human Rights Foundation of Turkey

HRFT, established in 1990, is a non governmental and non-profit organisation providing treatment and rehabilitation services for torture survivors and documenting human rights violations in Turkey. The HRFT grew out of the necessity to further promote the prevention of torture in Turkey where grave human rights violations left thousands of people tortured and traumatised.

¹ European Commission, European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) Country Based Support Scheme (CBSS) Turkey Programme, 2017-2019, Reference: EuropeAid/154567/DD/ACT/TRP.

² More information on the Project is available at: <http://www.tihvakademi.org>.

ONGOING THREATS TO TURKEY'S ACADEMICS FOR PEACE AND VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

In the recent period, the resumption of armed clashes related to the Kurdish issue in July 2015, 24-hour curfews and military operations in South-eastern Turkey, resulted in a dramatic rise in gross/serious human rights violations affecting a large population living in the region.³ Importantly, it also brought about novel infringements in terms of the right to defend human rights, freedom of expression and press, and academic freedom in the whole country.

In this period of systemic oppression, the Academics for Peace (AfP), called for the immediate termination of the gross/serious human rights violations in the regions affected by the curfews and military operations, by signing a petition, in January 2016, "We'll not be a party to this crime!" (also known as the "Peace Declaration").⁴ Academics who signed the petition have been particularly targeted as a symbol of human rights struggle carried out within Turkey's academia. They have been subject to several pressures, threats, and judicial and administrative harassments, and their work has been hindered by formal and informal constraints. The oppression process on these academics has evolved into a new phase with the state of emergency enforced following the coup attempt in July 2016.

Several judicial and administrative practices embarked on by state and higher education authorities brought about severe violations in terms of human rights, freedom of expression, and academic freedom.

Violation of the Right to Freedom of Expression

Rights violations against AfP emerged in relation to the judicial measures embarked on by state authorities for exercising the right to freely express their opinion and defend human rights. As reported by AfP, 70 signatory academics have been taken into police custody. As has also been documented by SAR (2016: 9), in one of the most notable cases, 4 academics were issued arrest warrants after giving a press conference, reinstating their commitment to the petition and challenging the state's response. Having been accused of spreading terrorist propaganda under the Anti-Terror Act, Article 7/2, they were held in pre-trial detention for several weeks, until being released upon their first court hearing.

In December 2017, 148 signatory academics from 16 universities have seen criminal investigations launched by the Istanbul High Criminal Court. Since 23 February 2018, 12 academics were found guilty of spreading terrorist propaganda under Article 7/2 of the Turkish Anti-Terror Act and received jail sentences of 15 months..

Violation of the Right to Work

Rights violations against AfP have also emerged in relation to the various targeted measures taken by Turkey's higher education authorities, like the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) of Turkey and university authorities. Through these measures, many academics faced dismissals, forced resignations and retirements, preventive suspensions, suspension from administrative duty and disciplinary investigations-measures which have violated academics' rights to work. AfP has reported 154 incidents involving dismissal, resignation and forced retirement. 101 academics have seen preventive suspension, while 7 suspended from administrative duty. Rights violations have also involved disciplinary investigations launched by university authorities, reported in 505 incidents. In 112 reported incidents, university authorities have asked the CoHE the dismissal of academics from public service, pending approval.

³ <https://tihv.org.tr/16-agustos-2015-1-mart-2018-tarihleri-arasinda-ilan-edilen-sokaga-cikma-yasaklari/>, accessed on 02.03.2018.

⁴ For the Declaration, see: <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/node/63>.

The oppression on these academics has evolved into a new phase with the state of emergency enforced following the coup attempt in July 2016. As part of the prolonged state of emergency, 31 emergency decree laws have been enacted (no.s 667-697) from 1 September 2016 to 24 December 2017, as a result of which many universities were closed down, graduate students who were studying abroad were expelled, academics were sacked or suspended from their jobs without explanation or due process of law.⁵ In this process 389 AfP have been dismissed by government decrees for signing the Peace Petition.⁶

The decree orders have effectively barred academics from exercising their right to work. First of all, they have effectively eliminated future academic employment prospects within Turkey, as personnel listed in the decree orders are banned for life from taking civil service positions. Moreover, other employment prospects for these academics have also proved nearly impossible as they have been labelled as “supporters of terrorism” by the public authorities, triggering a serious discrimination process against them and keeping employers from considering these academics as candidates for employment. Furthermore, academic employment prospects abroad have also been eliminated, as the dismissed academics have had their passports invalidated indefinitely. Hence, they have been stripped off their right to perform their jobs as well as the financial and intellectual conditions required for academic production.

Violation of the Right to Freedom of Movement

As described above, academics dismissed by decree laws were ordered their passports invalidated definitely, violating academics’ right to travel. Many other academics have been banned from travelling via cancellation of their passports without explanation. These same provisions have also been applied to the academics’ spouses and dependants. Having been barred from exercising their right to freedom of movement, academics have been prevented from travelling abroad to seek appropriate employment and education opportunities as well as other opportunities for international cooperations like participating in academic conferences, workshops and the like.

Violation of Academic Freedom

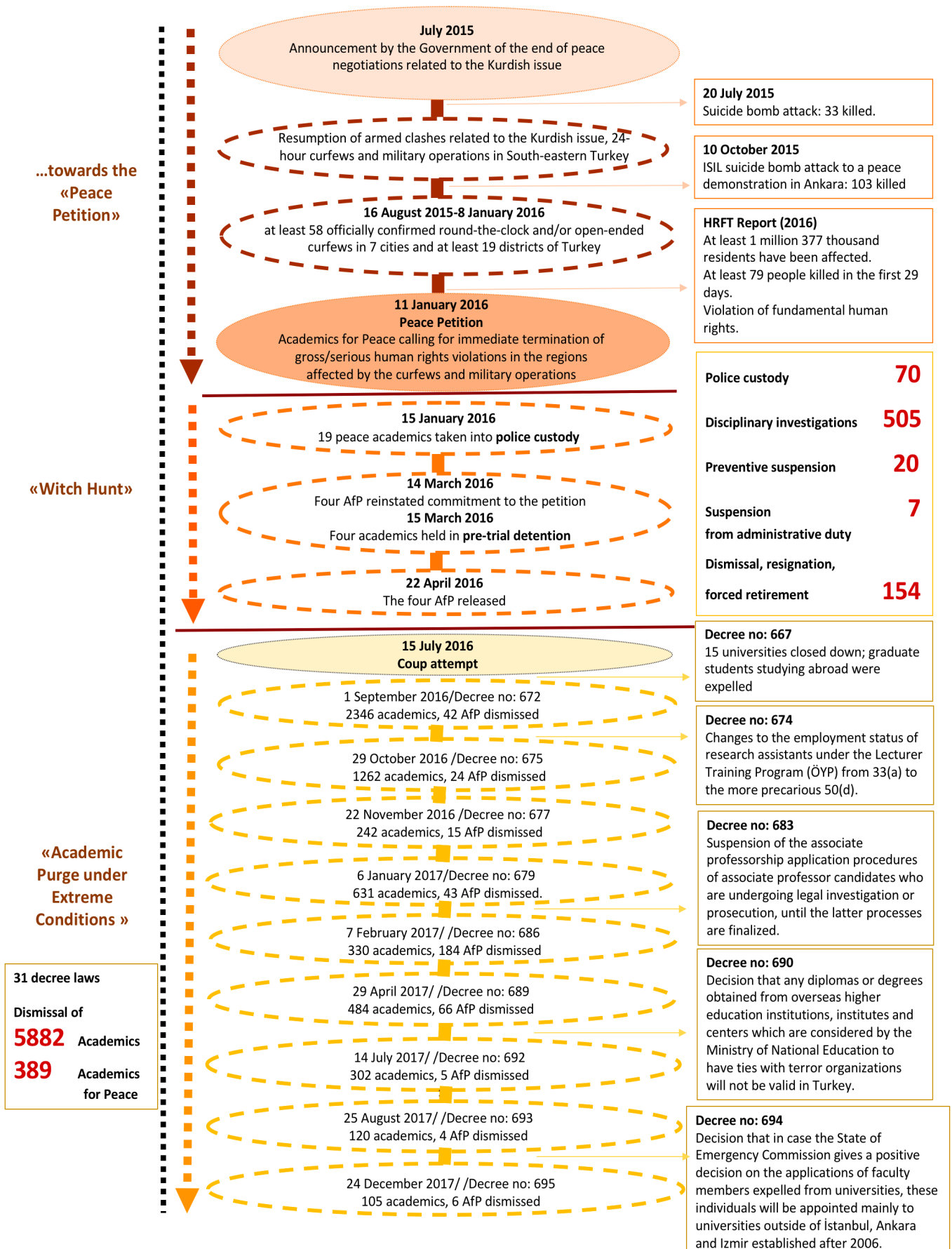
Several other practices have completely destroyed academic freedom, and all possibilities of conducting impartial and objective academic work at universities, giving way to a severe destruction of the institutional academic environment in Turkey, affecting not only academics, but also undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students.

In this process, various academics and students have been targeted for the content of their research, publications, teaching and other non-violent expressive activity, disfavoured by state, higher education and research authorities. They have seen research projects submitted to higher education and research institutions in charge of funding scientific research projects in Turkey rejected without going through the evaluation process. They have also faced exclusion from research panels and other funding opportunities enabling academics go abroad for post-doctoral research or sabbatical leave. Their participation in scientific meetings, publishing in the journals were hindered by government authorities. They have not been allowed to be editors or taking part in editorial boards. They have seen disinvitations from scheduled conferences due to the sensitivity of their topics or simply for avoiding trouble, while graduate students have been forced to change research topics. They have also been removed from processes of academic upgrading via decree laws.

⁵ 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/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2016\)037-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2016)037-e) (accessed on 25.02.2018).

⁶ Of the 389 signatories removed and banned from public service by decree laws, 3 had their tenures in public institutions other than universities. As reported by AfP, 42 of them had been dismissed or forced into resignation earlier.

THE OPPRESSION PROCESS ON TURKEY'S ACADEMICS FOR PEACE



SUPPORTING ACADEMICS AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ACTOR IN A CHALLENGING CONTEXT

The HRFT responds to these human rights violations and pressures against academics through its EU-funded project titled “Supporting academics as a human rights actor in a challenging context”. The Project aims to contribute to the development and consolidation of human rights and freedoms in Turkey by supporting academics and civil society actors as actors of the struggle for human rights in a challenging context. This project is designed and run in collaboration with a group of Academics for Peace from various disciplines who were dismissed from their posts at public universities, particularly in the Izmir region.

The overarching objective of the Project is to contribute to the development and consolidation of human rights in Turkey by supporting academics as a human rights actor in a challenging context.

To this end, the project specifically aims to:

- support and empower academics who have been facing political, judicial and administrative pressures due to their work and statements as human rights defenders
- facilitate their human rights related research and teaching within a civil society network
- increase the overall capacity of the human rights movement in Turkey through a holistic and integrative collaboration model between academics and civil society actors

More information on the Project is available at: www.tihvakademi.org

Human rights violations against academics have reached an unprecedented scale in Turkey. In the face of the recent developments in Turkey and growing authoritarianism all around the world, there is shared consideration among academics, civil society organisations, professionals, and activists that there is an urgent need to develop novel strategies and forms of action to effectively and collaboratively carry out the struggle for human rights in the face of recent developments.

Formed as part of HRFT's "Supporting Academics as a Human Rights Actor in a Challenging Context" Project, the Academics4HumanRights Network aims to establish and strengthen a formal civil society network on both national and international scales to effectively carry out human rights advocacy in a challenging context.

Academics, human rights and civil society organisations, professionals, and activists, and other institutions and individuals are invited to be part of the Academics for Human Rights Network. By joining the network, you or your institution will receive our newsletter that will inform you or your institution of the recent developments related to Turkey's academics and the violation of multiple rights. You will also be communicated about the ways in which we might collaborate with you or your institution to support and empower academics as human rights actors in a challenging context. To express your interest in joining the network, please send an email to: tihvakademi@gmail.com

ACADEMICS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

NETWORK

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