

Statement to the press and to the public

As Academics for Peace, we have been the target of a campaign of false accusations and intimidation since the 11th of January 2016, when we made public our declaration titled “We will not be party to this crime.” The vilification which we faced, verging on death threats against some signatories, was intended, first and foremost, to get us expelled from institutions of higher education, so that our voices could no longer be heard. However our colleagues who embraced our demands for peace and democracy solidarized with us and gave us support. One of the most tangible expressions of this support was that the number of signatories, which was 1128 on the 11th of January, rose to 2212 within a week thereafter. Especially in these days when the Istanbul Public Prosecutor’s Office is initiating legal action against us in order to step up the pressure, it is heartening to see that, as signatories, we are firmly united around our demand for peace.

Since the 11th of January, as a consequence of the acquiescence of many university administrations in the instructions of the Higher Educational Council, disciplinary actions without any legal basis have been taken against many of the signatories. Many signatories have been arbitrarily fired from their jobs, their offices and homes searched, and some detained by the police. Since the 11th of January, [as of 10 March] at least 9 dismissals, 5 resignations, 464 disciplinary investigations, 27 suspensions, 153 criminal investigations and 33 detentions have been recorded at public universities [of which there are 109]. At private universities [of which there are 84], at least 21 faculty members have been sacked, 1 was forced to retire and 43 face disciplinary investigation.

However, the issue which really sears our hearts today, and which should be resolved with the utmost urgency, is the establishment of the conditions for peace in the country. Since the past two months, the state of war in the Kurdish areas has raged with all its might, and only ruins remain of the cities and towns where the state claims to have conducted “cleansing” operations. Ruins where all living beings as well as history have been destroyed and where only human bones and unrecognizably charred bodies are being recovered.

At just this point, we face yet a new bill which has been drafted by the Ministry of Defense and presented to the Ministry of Justice, providing immunity to members of the security forces. Judging from the press reports, by endowing military personnel with a shield of impunity, this bill will encourage them to use force in ways which violate the law. It befalls the state to provide accountability and justice in the face of crimes against humanity and human rights violations. Impunity accorded to the perpetrators of such crimes will both wound the victims once again and also create deep scars in the public conscience. This impunity bill, which will take us yet further away from any prospect of peace by exacerbating the lawlessness of war, the injustice, violence and hate, should be withdrawn by all means.

Since the beginning of this week [starting the 7th of March], the Istanbul Public Prosecutor’s Office has started the process of legal investigations, even though they have not yet decided what charges will be levelled against us [the signatories]. However, we, as the Academics or Peace, would like to affirm that we will not step back, in spite of all the threats against our lives or our careers. We will act in accordance with the responsibility which befalls us as academics and researchers of this country. We will continue to strive with all our might, both for academic freedoms and for the institution of a lasting peace.

We therefore declare that we will accompany and solidarize with all our colleagues who face legal action and we will closely follow all such cases in the courts. Starting from next week, we will keep academic vigil at Sur and the other towns which have undergone destruction. We will stage teach-ins in front of universities which have laid off signatories of the Academics for Peace statement.

We know that the pressure brought to bear on academics asking for peace is part and parcel of the attempt at purging the universities of any dissident opinion. We are

determined to wage a legal battle against this intended purge, to protect our academic domain for intellectual output, and to continue to loudly voice our demand for peace.

Academics or Peace/ Istanbul