



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

1219 N Santa Rita Ave
The University of Arizona
Tucson AZ 85721 USA

520 621-5850
520 626-9095 fax
caf@mesana.org
www.mesana.org



January 5, 2016

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu
Office of the Prime Minister
Başbakanlık
06573 Ankara, Turkey
Via facsimile +90 312 417 0476

Dear Prime Minister Davutoğlu:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) of North America and its Committee on Academic Freedom in order to express our concern over reports that Haydar Darıcı, a PhD candidate at the University of Michigan, was arrested on Thursday, December 31, 2015 in Diyarbakır 30 minutes after he arrived from Istanbul. According to eyewitnesses, Darıcı was in the vicinity of a peaceful demonstration organized by the “Barış için yürüyorum/I’m walking for peace” initiative at Elazığ Cad. Diyar İş Merkezi, when the police dispersed demonstrators with water cannon and pepper gas. Darıcı was arrested while trying to assist demonstrators who were severely affected by pepper gas inhalation. Although Darıcı was released after four days in custody, a decision has apparently been taken by the courts to continue an investigation into potential charges related to his presence near the demonstration. As a result, he has been barred from leaving Turkey for an indefinite period. Given that Darıcı is enrolled in a Ph.D. program in the U.S., the court decision jeopardizes his ability to pursue his doctoral studies. We write to request that your government take steps to close the investigation, lift the travel ban and terminate any legal sanctions that may infringe on Darıcı’s academic freedom.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 3000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Darıcı is a doctoral student conducting anthropological research concerning Kurdish youth participation in political mobilization. This research will ultimately contribute to the doctoral dissertation he is preparing on Kurdish youth activism in Turkey. As part of his ongoing doctoral research, Darıcı makes regular visits to Diyarbakır. On December 31, 2015, he was in the city as an academic researcher, not as a participant in the activities of the “Barış için yürüyorum/I’m walking for peace” initiative. Yet he was taken into custody, together with twenty-three others on the grounds of violating the law on demonstrations and marches (*gösteri ve yürüyüş kanunu*) as well as provisions of the anti-terrorism law.

Criminal investigations of academics for the conduct of their legitimate research activities constitute a clear violation of academic freedom. Applying anti-terrorism laws or laws limiting demonstrations against scholars who are simply observing civil society activities during the conduct of their research is an unacceptable infringement on the requirements of academic fieldwork, particularly in anthropology. We urge you to take all necessary measures to revoke any judicial decisions restricting Haydar Darıcı’s academic freedom and to ensure that there will be no future prosecution related to his lawful research activities.

As a member state of the Council of Europe and a signatory of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Turkey is required to

protect freedom of thought, expression and assembly. Turkey is also a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), all of which protect the rights of freedom of opinion, expression and association, which are at the heart of academic freedom. These rights are also enshrined in articles 25-27 of the Turkish Constitution. We urge your government to take all necessary steps to ensure that these rights are protected.

We respectfully request that your government take immediate steps to clarify any charges against Darıcı as well as the grounds for the prohibition on his leaving Turkey. If Darıcı has been investigated and charged under terrorism-related laws and banned from leaving the country solely as a result of visiting Diyarbakır as part of his doctoral research and helping injured demonstrators, we ask that the ban be immediately lifted and that all charges be dropped. We also continue to urge you to take note of mounting international condemnation of the erosion of democratic rights and freedoms in Turkey, particularly as a consequence of the sweeping powers the government is employing under the rubric of antiterrorism in the southeastern provinces.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your positive response.

Yours sincerely,



Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City University of New York



Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director
Associate Professor, University of Arizona

cc:

- Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanı (President of the Turkish Republic)
- İsmail Kahraman, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Başkanı (President of the Turkish National Assembly)
- Bekir Bozdağ, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Adalet Bakanı (Justice Minister of the Republic of Turkey)
- Yekta Saraç, Türkiye Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu (YÖK) Başkanı (President of the Turkish Higher Education Council)
- Barbara Lochbihler, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights
- Monika Kacinskiene, Member of the Cabinet of Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
- Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations
- Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights