



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

3542 N Geronimo Ave
Tucson AZ 85705 USA

tel 520-333-2577
fax 520-207-3166
caf@mesana.org
www.mesana.org



February 16, 2017

Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım
Office of the Prime Minister
Başbakanlık
06573 Ankara
Turkey

Dear Prime Minister Yıldırım,

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 Ahmet Yükleyen, an internationally renowned anthropologist, was arrested at his home in Istanbul on the morning of Monday, December 15, 2016. After 26 days in pre-trial detention, Dr. Yükleyen has been accused of being a member of the Fetullah Gülen Terrorist Organization/Parallel State Organization (FETÖ/PDY). The only proof presented in support of this charge is his communication and interviews with members of the Gülen movement as part of ethnographic research he conducted during the academic year 2013-14. Entitled "Global Migration and New Cosmopolitanism," this research project was funded by the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies of Notre Dame University and led by Professor Robert Hefner of Boston University. The project aimed to examine the efforts by Muslim, Catholic, and secular educators and leaders in Canada, the United States, the Netherlands and France to develop new programs of civic education capable of countering discrimination against Muslims in these four countries, by developing new programs of civic education and inclusion. Dr. Yükleyen was responsible for conducting the part of the research that concerned the Netherlands.

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.

Dr. Ahmet Yükleyen is a prominent and well-regarded scholar of Islam, secularism, democracy, and minority rights in Turkey and Europe. Born and raised in the Netherlands, Dr. Yükleyen holds a PhD from Boston University, and served as a Croft Associate Professor of International Relations at the University of Mississippi. He was a senior fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and a Jennings Randolph Senior Fellow at the US Institute for Peace. In the last two years, he has been working as an Associate Professor of International Relations at the Istanbul Commerce University. Dr. Yükleyen is the author of *Localizing Islam in Europe: Muslim Communities in Germany and Netherlands*, published by Syracuse University Press, and the co-author of *Secularism, Democracy, and Islam in Europe*, published by TESEV in Turkey. As a leading scholar of Turkish Muslim communities and Islamophobia in Europe, Dr. Yükleyen has appeared regularly in the national and international media. At the time of his arrest, he was writing up the findings of his important research on Muslim communities in the Netherlands and Turkey.

As an anthropologist, Dr. Ykleyen utilizes ethnographic field methods that include meeting his informants and conducting open-ended interviews. He used the same methods during his research on Muslim organizations that organize educational activities in the Netherlands in 2013-14. In order to learn about these activities, Dr. Ykleyen conducted open-ended interviews with members of the Glen movement and other Muslim organizations active in the field of education. Today, Dr. Ykleyen is under arrest for legitimately conducting scholarly ethnographic research. His interview notes and communications to set up meetings with his interviewees are now being used as evidence of his membership in a terrorist organization. His arrest constitutes a blatant violation of academic freedom.

We respectfully ask that your government take immediate steps to release Dr. Ykleyen and drop all charges against him. We also ask that your government desist from broadening the definition of terrorism to encompass the lawful and protected activities of academics, journalists, NGO advocates, and students. In the aftermath of the failed coup attempt, your government has an opportunity to restore confidence in its commitment to democratic rights and freedoms by taking steps to protect academic freedom, the right to education, freedom of expression and freedom of association. If the government wishes to pursue allegations against the academics who have been detained, it should do so in accordance with basic procedural rights and the rule of law, through open court proceedings giving individuals an opportunity to confront any alleged evidence and offer a defense and appeal. Until and unless such procedures are instituted, all those scholars, academics and students who are being detained should be released.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'B. Baron' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City University of New York

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Amy W. Newhall' in a cursive style.

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

cc:

Recep Tayyip Erdođan, Trkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanı (President of the Republic of Turkey)

İsmail Kahraman, Trkiye Byk Millet Meclisi Bařkanı (President of the Turkish National Assembly)

Bekir Bozdađ, Trkiye Cumhuriyeti Adalet Bakanı (Justice Minister of the Republic of Turkey)

Yekta Saraç, Trkiye Yksek đretim Kurulu (YK) Bařkanı (President of the Turkish Higher Education Council)

Elena Valenciano, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

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 Muiřnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Kati Piri, Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament

Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

David Kaye, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Kishore Singh, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education

Serdar Kılıç, Turkish Ambassador to the United States

John R. Bass, United States Ambassador to Turkey