



**Middle
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MESA
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Montréal

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Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
Office of the Prime Minister
Başbakanlık
06573 Ankara, Turkey
Via facsimile +90 312 417 0476

Dear Prime Minister Erdoğan:

I write to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom in order to express our dismay and grave concern over the detention and deportation from Turkey of Finnish independent scholar and freelance journalist Dr. Kristiina Koivunen. Dr. Koivunen was stopped at Van Ferit Melen Airport on December 15, 2006, and was held in an officially unacknowledged detention for 46 hours. On December 17 she was put on a flight from Istanbul Ataturk Airport under police surveillance and expelled from Turkey.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (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 more than 2700 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. Kristiina Koivunen is a specialist on the Kurdish question in Turkey. The title of her Ph.D. dissertation is *The Invisible War in North Kurdistan* (University of Helsinki, Faculty of Social Sciences, September 2002). She is also the author of two travelogues (*Teetä Kurdistanissa*, 2001; *Sankarimatka ilijan Kaakkois-Turkki*, 2006) on eastern Turkey. As a journalist she had published over 200 articles on Turkish affairs and, most recently, she interviewed Turkish Minister of Defense Vecdi Gönül on November 3, 2006. The interview was published by a Finnish newspaper.

Since 1997, she has visited Turkey sixteen times for research purposes. On her last trip, she entered the country on November 29, 2006 and traveled across Turkey without encountering any difficulties. After her detention at the Van airport she was taken first to the anti-terrorism bureau (Terörle Mücadele Şubesi) in Van, and was later moved to the foreigner's bureau (Yabancılar Şubesi). The following day she was flown to Istanbul and held at police headquarters in Istanbul's Ataturk Airport. Despite Dr. Koivunen's and her lawyer's repeated requests, she was not issued any official documents articulating reasons for, or recognizing the fact of, her detention and her deportation. Dr. Koivunen was informed only verbally by a police chief that her entrance to the country was barred pursuant to a decision by the Ministry of Interior in August 2006. That decision was allegedly made months before her most recent arrival, and she was not provided with any notice of that decision until the time of her detention and removal from the country. In fact, on November 29, she was granted entry without incident. We have been informed that after repeated official appeals for justification, the Finnish Embassy in Ankara was

faxed a copy of the Turkish Passport Law with the eighth article circled. We understand (through the fifth paragraph of the article) that she was expelled from the country because the Ministry had 'foreseen' that her presence in the country would pose a threat to public order.

Our committee is deeply concerned about the unacceptable treatment of Dr. Koivunen. (1) We regard the Turkish Ministry of Interior's alleged decision as a clear violation of the right to research. Dr Koivunen had never violated Turkish laws during her numerous previous visits to the country, yet, your Ministry's prohibition now makes it impossible for Dr. Koivunen to conduct research in Turkey. (2) Notwithstanding the decision of the Turkish Ministry of Interior, Dr. Koivunen was granted permission to enter the country on November 29, which meant her stay in the country would be under legal protection. Yet, her legal right to stay in the country was revoked arbitrarily; no reasons were officially provided for her detention, for the revocation of her visa, nor for her ultimate deportation. Further she was not granted any opportunity to legally challenge the official determination.

We are deeply saddened to observe a radical deterioration of the conditions for carrying out critical intellectual work in Turkey over the past six months. The right of individuals to freely express nonviolent opinions has been progressively undermined in the country, fomenting a climate of intimidation and fear. Critical intellectuals expressing opinions or doing research in Turkey have recently been intimidated either through the application of restrictive (and vaguely formulated) legal statutes (such as Article 301 of Turkish Penal code), through the violent attacks of ultra-nationalist militants or, as we see in the case of Dr. Koivunen, through official but arbitrary and illegal undertakings. This situation gravely damages the image of Turkey as a committed member of the democratic international community. We hope that you share our concerns and that you will promptly implement measures to preclude any further violations of basic and universally recognized essential liberties, including freedom of expression.

In the case at hand, we urge you to take relevant steps to restore Dr. Kristiina Koivunen's right to conduct research in Turkey. We also ask that you initiate an investigation into the arbitrary and unjustifiable treatment to which she was subjected.

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

Sincerely,



Zachary Lockman
MESA President