

15 January 2016

Ambassador Abdurrahman Bilgiç
Turkish Embassy
43 Belgrave Square
LONDON
SW1X 8PA

Your Excellency

On behalf of the 110,000 members of the University and College Union (UCU), I am writing to you with my union's concerns about the ongoing attacks on academic freedom in Turkey.

In particular we are very concerned about the recent threats made to nearly 1200 academics from dozens of universities in Turkey who have signed a petition calling for the Turkish government to end state violence in the Kurdish region. We were concerned to note that shortly after President Erdogan's speech criticising the petition (led by Academics for Peace and supported by nearly 400 international academics), the Turkish Higher Education Council announced that it would launch an investigation against those who has signed the petition in Turkey. This is an unacceptable attack on academic freedom and freedom of expression and we call on your government to withdraw these threats.

Alongside our global union federation, Education International, we are also deeply concerned about ongoing violence in Eastern Turkey. One of our specific concerns is the safety and wellbeing of students and teachers in the Kurdish region. Our colleagues in the teacher trade union (Egitim-Sen) have brought to our attention that school buildings have been appropriated by the army and the police. We have also learnt that school teachers have received text messages from the authorities summoning them to leave the region and to attend ad hoc training programs without any further explanation given to them. As a result, hundreds of thousands of school children are unable to attend school.

UCU calls on the Turkish authorities to bring the violent confrontations in Eastern Turkey to an end, to allow teachers to return to their workplaces, including those employed in Cizre and Silopi, and to have military and police forces vacate all school buildings they currently occupy, so that classes can be resumed as soon as possible.

I look forward to hearing from you as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sally Hunt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Sally Hunt
General Secretary