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We, the undersigned, are very concerned about the incarceration decisions against Academics for Peace in Turkey and demand that the Turkish authorities withdraw unlawful acts and lift all measures against freedom of speech and academic freedom.

It was on February 25 that Istanbul Regional Court of Justice rejected the appeal ratifying the conviction of Prof. Dr. Füsün Üstel. Retired professor of Political Science at the University of Galatasaray, Prof. Üstel was convicted with 15-months imprisonment for having signed a peace petition in 2016. Along with her numerous specialties, Prof. Üstel is a prominent academic in the field of citizenship and cultural studies, and a defender of academic freedoms in Turkey.

Since the public announcement of the petition of Academics for Peace in January 11, 2016, Turkey has been legally persecuting signatory academics. 535 signatory academics were dismissed, or forced to resign or retire from their university positions. 407 of those were removed from employment in the public service by the state of emergency decrees that were issued in the aftermath of the coup attempt in July 2016. Hundreds of signatories have been subjected to administrative investigations and mobbing by their universities, hundreds had to leave Turkey. By abuse of her judicial system to punish academics, dissident politicians, journalists, activists, students and lawyers, Turkey has demonstrated how laws can be instrumentalized to suppress opposition, academic freedom and quest for peace.

Since December 5, 2017, 652 signatory academics have been indicted and charged with "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization." So far, 137 of them have been convicted either for "terrorist propaganda" or "aiding and abetting a terrorist organization." The whole lawsuit process has been unfairly conducted, violating the constitution and the basic right of defence that would have secured a fair trial.

Thus far, court rulings have been erratic and revealed the arbitrariness of the process. Despite that the charges against peace academics were the same, verdicts have so far varied, ranging from 15 to 36 months of imprisonment. Moreover, terms of the sentence also differ. While the pronouncement of the sentence was suspended for 108 academics, which means that they will be under probation during the next five years, neither the pronouncement nor the execution of the sentence was suspended for 28 signatories.

We, the undersigned, have followed up with concern that Prof. Üstel is among those whose sentences have not been suspended. Upon the recent decision of the Court of Appeal, she is expected to begin serving her sentence in the following days. Tens of other academics are likely to face the same risk in the coming days. As the persecution of the signatory academics has reached a new level with the imminent imprisonment of Prof. Füsün Üstel, we call upon the international community to act promptly in solidarity with the Academics for Peace on the path to defend academic freedoms and peace.

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