

**2015-2016 ASA Council
Unanimous Decisions by Email
July 25, 2016, and July 28, 2016**

Minutes

Members Participating: Ruth Milkman (President), Barbara Risman (Vice President), Michele Lamont (President-elect), Kathleen Gerson (Vice President-elect), Paula England (Past President), Cecilia Menjivar (Past Vice President), Mary Romero (Secretary);
Members-at-Large: Daniel F. Chambliss, Cynthia Feliciano, Tina Fetner, Tanya Maria Golash-Boza, Margaret Hunter, Peter Kivisto, Karen Lacy, Leslie McCall, Mignon R. Moor, Wendy Ng, Patricia E. White, Adia M. Harvey-Wingfield

Background

Following the recent failed coup in Turkey, activities of the Turkish government have come under significant criticism from many countries. Members of the academic community in the United States were particularly concerned about the Turkish Governments forced resignations and/or firings of a very large number of administrators at virtually all Turkish universities. Members of the ASA called for Council to respond to this as a threat to the independence of scholars and university personnel in Turkey with ramifications for international academic and scholarly communication and a violation of human rights.

Council responded by signing two separate letters. On July 25, members of Council completed voting unanimously by email to sign the first letter. To respond quickly and with as much leverage as possible, Council members responded to the following email request sent on behalf of the ASA President by the Executive Officer to sign to a letter drafted by the Middle East Studies Association. Council members voted unanimously and the ASA was added to the growing list of scholarly associations signing the MESA letter.

Members of Council,

ASA has received a number of requests for a response from Council on behalf of the Association to the situation in the higher education system of Turkey that has arisen in the aftermath of the attempted political coup. President Ruth Milkman, President-elect Michele Lamont, and immediate Past President Paula England met yesterday during the EOB meeting to discuss a possible Council response.

Given the immediacy of the problem, they suggest that Council members vote to have the ASA join with a growing group of social science and humanities scholarly societies that are signing the letter which follows below, drafted by the Middle East Studies Association.

After reviewing the letter, please email me **YES**—if you agree to adding ASA as a **signatory** or **NO** if you do **not** approve. Recall that email votes of Council must be *unanimous* to make a final decision. Please respond via “reply all” so that all members of Council may see how the vote is going, and do so if possible by Monday morning, July 25. Many thanks.

The MESA Letter:[Insert names of scholarly organizations here] collectively note with profound concern the apparent moves to dismantle much of the structure of Turkish higher education through purges, restrictions, and assertions of central control, a process begun earlier this year and accelerating now with alarming speed.

As scholarly associations, we are committed to the principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression. The recent moves in Turkey herald a massive and virtually unprecedented assault on those principles. One of the Middle East region's leading systems of higher education is under severe threat as a result, as are the careers and livelihoods of many of its faculty members and academic administrators.

Our concern about the situation in Turkish universities has been mounting over the past year, as Turkish authorities have moved to retaliate against academics for expressing their political views—some merely signing an “Academics for Peace” petition criticizing human rights violations.

Yet the threat to academic freedom and higher education has recently worsened in a dramatic fashion. In the aftermath of the failed coup attempt of July 15-16, 2016, the Turkish government has moved to purge government officials in the Ministry of Education and has called for the resignation of all university deans across the country's public and private universities. As of this writing, it appears that more than 15,000 employees at the education ministry have been fired and nearly 1600 deans—1176 from public universities and 401 from private universities—have been asked to resign. In addition, 21,000 private school teachers have had their teaching licenses cancelled. Further, reports suggest that travel restrictions have been imposed on academics at public universities and that Turkish academics abroad were required to return to Turkey. The scale of the travel restrictions, suspension and imposed resignations in the education sector seemingly go much farther than the targeting of individuals who might have had any connection to the attempted coup.

The crackdown on the education sector creates the appearance of a purge of those deemed inadequately loyal to the current government. Moreover, the removal of all of the deans across the country represents a direct assault on the institutional autonomy of Turkey's universities. The replacement of every university's administration simultaneously by the executive-controlled Higher Education Council would give the government direct administrative control of all Turkish universities. Such concentration and centralization of power over all universities is clearly inimical to academic freedom. Moreover, the government's existing record of requiring university administrators' to undertake sweeping disciplinary actions against perceived opponents—as was the case against the Academics for Peace petition signatories—lends credence to fears that the change in university administrations will be the first step in an even broader purge against academics in Turkey.

Earlier this year, it was already clear that the record of violations by the Turkish government of academic freedom and freedom of expression amassed in a matter of months has been staggering. The aftermath of the coup may have accelerated and widened those attacks on academic freedom in even more alarming ways.

As scholarly organizations, we collectively call for respect for academic freedom—including freedom of expression, opinion, association and travel—and the autonomy of universities in Turkey, offer our support to our Turkish colleagues, second the Middle East Studies Association's “call for action” of January 15, request that Turkey's diplomatic interlocutors (both states and international organizations) advocate vigorously for the rights of Turkish scholars and the autonomy of Turkish universities, suggest other scholarly organizations speak forcefully about the threat to the Turkish academy, and alert academic institutions throughout the world that Turkish colleagues are likely to need moral and substantive support in the days ahead.

Shortly after this vote, Council received a second request from the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) of which ASA is an institutional member to again sign a letter to reflect the scientific community's concern with the situation in the institutions of higher education in Turkey. The ASA Executive Officer sent the following request to Council members on behalf of the ASA president. All Council members responded affirmatively by July 28, 2016, and the Executive Officer signed on behalf of the Association.

Members of Council,

ASA has received a request from the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) of which ASA is an organizational member for the Association to sign the attached letter which AAAS plans to send to President Erdogan (via the Turkish Ambassador to the United States) shortly.

ASA Council has already unanimously approved ASA signing the MESA letter (which is more strongly worded than the AAAS letter) so I am assuming Council members will want to ASA to sign this one because AAAS is the national association for all scientific disciplines in the United States. I believe it is highly desirable for ASA to do so.

Please *Reply All* either **YES (Sign the AAAS letter)** or **NO (do not sign)** as quickly as possible, hopefully by close of business tomorrow, Wednesday, July 27. Thank you in advance for your response.

Proposed statement for sending to President Erdogan of Turkey via the Turkish Ambassador in the U.S.:

The AAAS Letter: As the democratically elected government of Turkey restores order and peace after overcoming the failed illegal coup, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) sincerely hopes that the human rights of the scientific community are protected. In a globalized world, the future prosperity and security of any nation depends on its ability to be a knowledge-based, innovative society and to a considerable extent on the work of its scientists, engineers, academics, and researchers. Turkey has made great progress over the past decade in greatly strengthening its scientific and academic institutions, which are essential for training the next generation and stimulating new innovations that benefit society. Sustaining a high-quality scientific enterprise requires that scientists have freedom to think independently and innovatively and are able, with minimal hindrances, to engage with scientists around the world, including traveling and collaborating in research outside Turkey, in pursuit of excellence in their scientific investigations. The government of Turkey has stated that "democracy, freedom, and the rule of law are nonnegotiable in Turkey." We hope that in the pursuit of justice the government will follow through on this pledge to fully respect human rights, the rule of law, and due process and thereby protect its citizens and its scientific community.