

January 12, 2007

Statement in support of Taner Akçam

Dr. Taner Akçam, a visiting professor of history at the University of Minnesota since 2002, is subject to criminal investigation in Turkey for asserting that the Armenian deportations of 1915-17 constituted a genocide. Charges are pending under Turkey's notorious Articles 301.1 ("insulting Turkishness"), 214 ("instigation to commit a crime"), 215 ("praise of a crime and a criminal"), and 216 ("instigating public animosity and hatred"). We are gravely concerned about this threat to freedom of expression and academic freedom.

Professor Akçam was invited to the University of Minnesota by the Department of History and the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, with support from colleagues in the Law School and the College of Liberal Arts. There was and is great interest in his work on late Ottoman history and the Armenian Genocide, the legal aspects of the Genocide, and the relation of these events to issues of democratization in Turkey and the region. Akçam's scholarship has been lauded by scholars and intellectuals across the globe, including in Turkey despite the longstanding official policy to deny the Armenian Genocide.

The University of Minnesota's Department of History and Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies consider Akçam to be one of the foremost historians of the late Ottoman Empire and the Armenian Genocide. Professor Akçam, in addition to researching the subject, seeks reconciliation between Armenians and Turks so that both peoples can develop a normal and productive relationship in the 21st century.

Professor Akçam, the first Turkish intellectual to recognize the Armenian Genocide as such, is the latest to be investigated for "insulting Turkishness." Other high-profile targets include, in recent months, Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk, novelist and professor Elif Shafak of the University of Arizona, and Istanbul Armenian journalist Hrant Dink.

We support Taner Akçam's right to academic freedom and freedom of expression. We utterly reject the efforts by official Turkish sources to stifle his speech and publications.

Sincerely,

Dr. Eric D. Weitz
Professor and Chair of History
Arsham and Charlotte Ohanessian Chair
in the College of Liberal Arts

Dr. Stephen Feinstein
Director, Center for Holocaust
and Genocide Studies