



**Association of International Education Administrators**  
*Leaders in International Higher Education*

**Higher Education and Recent Events in Turkey**

Recent events in Turkey have affected the education community in ways that are of grave concern to the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA), a US-based organization whose members are university leaders from around the world.

A state of emergency has been declared, and Turkey has suspended its adherence to international human rights agreements such as: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; and the European Convention on Human Rights. Suspensions and detentions of educators appear to be components of a broader purge that threatens to shake the foundations of academic inquiry and freedom of thought in the country.

In recent days we have seen reports that more than 21,000 private school teachers have had their licenses revoked, and that approximately 15,200 employees of the Education Ministry have been suspended. News organizations are reporting that four university rectors have been suspended, and that all 1,577 academic deans in the country have been asked to resign. 1,176 of these are from public universities and 401 from private institutions. At Istanbul University alone some 95 professors are reported to have been suspended, and there are widespread reports of a steady dissolution of academic freedoms. Legislation has been introduced that would reportedly undermine the autonomy of private universities, and to strengthen government control over the education sector as a whole.

Restrictions and uncertainty surrounding international travel for academics in both public and private institutions have been reported. The Education Ministry recently suspended academics from public institutions from assignments abroad (conferences, seminars, sabbaticals, etc.). Leaves in these institutions have been cancelled, and even foreign nationals have been called back to work. Private university employees seeking vacation travel abroad have been advised to document their employment and their authorized leave status for passport controls in advance of international flights. A chill on pre-existing forms of international engagement would appear to be inevitable.

The issues surrounding the situation in Turkey are complex. The higher education sector appears to be spiraling in a dangerous direction, with implications not only for Turkey but for the region and the world. Education is not the only sector of Turkish society to be the target of the crackdown: the judicial system, the armed forces, and other sectors of civil society face similar pressures.

AIEA recognizes a range of perspectives and opinions as to the causes and potential solutions to the difficult issues facing Turkey. We encourage our members to learn more about the situation, to stay abreast of developments, and to engage in discussion and debate on our respective universities. Above all, we express our concern for the welfare of our colleagues in Turkish higher education, and our commitment to principles of academic freedom, scholarly inquiry, international mobility and the free exchange of ideas. Please join us in focusing attention on these issues, and to support Turkish and other scholars at risk.