February 1, 2018

The International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (H.R. Network) is an alliance of more than 80 national academies and scholarly societies that supports and defends the fundamental rights of fellow academics and health professionals worldwide. We, the members of the H.R. Network’s Executive Committee, are deeply concerned about recent acts of harassment and intimidation against the Turkish Medical Association (TMA) and its leadership in connection with a statement issued by the TMA on January 24 expressing concern about the adverse public health effects of Turkey’s military operation in Afrin, Syria and calling for peace.

Following release of the TMA’s statement, the association and its members have received numerous threats of physical violence by email, telephone, and social media. Reports also indicate that the TMA has been targeted for harassment by certain media outlets, trade organizations, and paramilitary groups. We are alarmed by the serious nature of the threats being made against the TMA’s members and staff and call for the Turkish government to take immediate steps to ensure their personal safety.

We are further concerned that, on January 30, the TMA’s main office in Ankara was raided by police, and all 11 members of the TMA’s Central Council were taken into custody as part of a criminal investigation launched by the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s office in connection with the TMA’s January 24 statement. The statement, as described above, clearly constitutes the peaceful exercise of the TMA members’ fundamental rights to freedom of opinion and expression. These rights are protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, both of which Turkey has ratified. Thus we urge the Turkish government to ensure that all legal processes solely related to the signing of the statement will be dropped and the TMA’s leaders will be promptly released.

Arjuna Aluwihare, Sri Lanka
Édouard Brézin, France
Martin Chalfie*, United States of America
Carol Corillon, United States of America
Abdallah S. Daar, Oman/Canada
Raghavendra Gadagkar, India
Belita Koiller, Brazil
Pedro León Azofeifa, Costa Rica
Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, Ghana
Dong-Pil Min, Republic of Korea
Ida Nicolaisen, Denmark
John Polanyi*, Canada
Ovid Tzeng, Taiwan

*Nobel Laureate