Following the June 2015 general elections, Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) renewed the state’s forty-year-long war against Kurds. This move ended the peace negotiations that had been taking place between the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) and the government since 2013. The resurgence of the war has led to increasing ultranationalist rhetoric in the media, public shaming of dissidents, and persecution of Kurdish and leftist politicians, further curtailing the already-limited political freedoms and basic rights in the country. Since August 16, 2015, the government has been imposing indefinite curfews in seven Kurdish-populated cities in Turkey. The curfews and clashes have resulted in the deaths of at least 198 civilians, while hundreds of thousands have been forced to migrate.

On January 10, 2016, 1,128 academics released a peace petition condemning the Turkish state’s acts and declared that they “will not be a party to this crime.” The statement quickly went viral, mostly due to President Erdogan’s open targeting of the signatories by declaring them “traitors.” In less than two hours following Erdogan’s speech, the Turkish Higher Education Council announced that it would launch an investigation against those signatories who are affiliated with Turkish higher education and research institutions. Since then, academics who signed the petition have been publicly targeted, criminalized, and fired from their positions in universities. Despite increasing pressure from the government, media, and judiciary, the peace petition’s signatures had increased to 2,279 by January 20th.

This panel sheds light upon the ongoing attacks against academic freedoms and freedom of speech in Turkey. Perhaps more importantly, it also intends to publicize the current war in Kurdish cities and unmask the atrocities committed by the Turkish state -- the original intent of the Turkish academics’ peace petition.