

Peace Islands Institute hosted [Dr. James Harrington](#) at Ant Bookstore in Clifton on March 1st 2012. Journalist/Writer Aydogan Vatandas interviewed Dr. James Harrington on his book titled **"Wrestling with Free Speech, Religious Freedom, and Democracy in Turkey: The Political Trials and Times of Fethullah Gulen"**.

Following the interview, Dr. James Harrington did a book signing of his book. We thank him for his presence.



Aydogan Vatandas: Mr. Harrington thank you so much for coming all the way from Texas, you are a law professor and how did you happen to find such a topic to write about?

James Harrington: Let me thank you for the invitation to come and talk with you all. I got into it and eventually interested in doing this book because of the interfaith trip that was organized from Austin, Texas with judges and lawyers. We were in Turkey for maybe eight days or so.

When I came back, I was invited to write about the trial that I had no knowledge. I was interested in doing it because I'm very interested in Human Rights Law. I never had much of a chance to do anything in International Human Rights Law because all my work is concentrated

in Texas.

I actually said okay and then I did a lot of struggling research and did two weeks of interviews in Turkey and maybe another week of interviews in the United States, and it took me about a year to go to.

Aydogan Vatandas: How many people did you interview?

James Harrington: I wouldn't estimate, probably about 50 altogether.



Aydogan Vatandas: Including the prosecutors?

James Harrington: The prosecutors were not talking, which is not surprising because their case was very weak and it was kind of absurd so I wasn't surprised. But, there was also a parallel trial going on here in the Immigration Court, I was able to talk to the US attorney, the

attorney representing the district and then there was also a deposition that was taken as we land here as part of the trial on Turkey so I talked to that attorney.

Aydogan Vatandas: How did you choose your interviewees in Turkey?

James Harrington: I did it pretty at random I would say. There was the list of journalists that were suggested to me, so I talked to a number of journalists. I talked to law professors, I talked to a person from the World Bank.

I tried to be as varied as possible and in the interfaith trip, we talked to a lot of people. So I had a lot of perspective from the people that were involved in the Gulen (Hizmet) movement. It took me a long time to understand the movement because, being a lawyer, we're looking for a hierarchy and structure and I understand that the movement doesn't have that kind of structures. More coordinated, I would say. So, it took me a while to understand that. By the end of the first trip I had an idea of how the movement worked at least from my perspective. So, then I would interview other people.

Aydogan Vatandas: What was the accusation against Mr. Gulen?

James Harrington: When you read it, it's really absurd. A year before the indictment, [a ferocious media campaign](#) began and the entire indictment was gathered from this media campaign.

It was so absurd that it was summarized in the opinion by the judges. I think that you have to respect the words of the judges, because they pulled in all of the accusations that have fallen around. These were the accusations that were in the media, part of media campaign and the prosecutors listed all of them. Back to what the judges did, they evaluated all of the evidence, so it was really pretty interesting.

The stuff that was out there was pretty bad. Mr. Gulen was named as a CIA agent to Turkey, an agent of China and my favorite of course was the secret cardinal of the Pope. And being a Catholic I know that's not very probable.

When he was charged, two things were going on. One of course “the sub-text” is to get him out of the picture because he’s a threat to the establishment, he’s a threat to the deep-state, he’s a threat to the emerging middle class in Anatolia side of Turkey and then second, education is never something you want to promote if you want to keep power. So, that’s what was going on.

They had charged him under the anti-terrorist act, which at that time in Turkey was a crime to change the essential nature of the Turkish state. So they said there were two things going on. The first thing is that he wanted to implement Sharia law, and the second is he was the leader and making himself the leader of the Muslims in Turkey. Thereby replacing the religious minister and therefore change in the essential nature of the state. That was the charge.

The interesting thing about the indictment that in Turkish law: when you indict someone, you can also indict the property. I think part of this was to get a hold of the property that they could ascribe to the movement. I mean get a hold of the schools, get a hold of the foundations etc. Ironically, under Turkish law, the government can take the property once they have indicted somebody, even they’ve been acquitted but they didn’t in this case. It is very clear to me that there was a whole civil attack on the movement. They were not going to get Mr. Gulen out of commission but they were going to get all the assets they could. He had been indicted after the ’70 coup and that was eventually dismissed because of amnesty. But you go back and look at that indictment was also an indictment of property of the movement. So it is pretty clear that this was almost a similar attack to get him out of the picture, and the movement.

I’ll tell you something interesting, part of this was just to demoralize the movement. I have talked to different communities, this is the 19th talk I’ve done about the book and people tell me about the things they remember happening.



