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Doing
Columbia
Global

Building
resilience,
transforming
tomorrow



A message from İpek Cem Taha, Director of the Columbia Global Center Istanbul



In a year marked by profound challenges across Türkiye and our region, we have witnessed something remarkable: the extraordinary power of human resilience when supported by intellectual rigor and meaningful collaboration. As our community—scholars, students, local partners, and global colleagues—came together to respond, rebuild, and reimagine what recovery looks like, we demonstrated that the greatest innovations often emerge from our most challenging moments.

The devastating February 2023 earthquakes tested our region's resolve in unprecedented ways. But with the launch of Columbia's Global Resilience Fund, we transformed crisis into opportunity—advancing recovery efforts that went beyond immediate aid to address systemic challenges. From pioneering trauma therapy approaches for survivors to developing sophisticated urban risk management strategies and ensuring health equity for refugees, our response exemplified how academic expertise can catalyze tangible change. In the pages that follow, we invite you to explore the breadth of our impact over the past year—how our initiatives have shaped scholarship, strengthened communities, and fostered resilience in the face of adversity—and to join us as we continue this vital work in the year ahead.

This past year, we are particularly proud of how we've expanded our impact through initiatives like our Voices of Emerging Scholars series, which is nurturing the next generation of thought leaders in Turkish and Ottoman studies. Our critical dialogues on diplomacy, climate, and urban development have brought together diverse voices to imagine new possibilities for our shared future. Through our journalism programs, we've helped preserve and strengthen independent media voices at a time when they are most needed.

As we look ahead, we are filled with profound optimism. Yes, the challenges we face—as individuals, communities, and a global society—are complex. But our work at the Istanbul Center demonstrates that when we combine academic excellence with local wisdom, when we merge global perspectives with regional understanding, we can create solutions that resonate far beyond our immediate geography.

With gratitude and anticipation for our shared future,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'İpek Cem Taha'.

İpek Cem Taha
Director of the Columbia Global Center Istanbul



Where Ideas Meet Impact

Advancing Recovery Through Innovation: The Global Resilience Fund

What happens when one of the world's leading academic institutions joins forces with local changemakers in a region facing unprecedented challenges? At the **Columbia Global Center in Istanbul**, the answer unfolds daily through groundbreaking research, disaster risk reduction and resilience, and cross-cultural dialogue that shapes our global future.

When the February 2023 earthquakes struck Türkiye, our response went beyond immediate aid to pioneer innovative solutions for long-term recovery. The Global Resilience Fund, launched by Columbia Global, became a cornerstone of our impact, supporting groundbreaking projects that merge academic expertise with practical needs:

Healing Minds, Understanding Trauma Under the leadership of Professor Çağhan Kızıl from the Department of Neurology and the Taub Institute, and Professor Richard Mayeux, Chair of the Department of Neurology at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, our focused group therapy program is revolutionizing trauma recovery. By combining therapeutic support with advanced EEG-based brain imaging, we're not only helping 500 survivors process their experiences but also advancing our understanding of emotional regulation in crisis situations. This research will inform trauma response strategies worldwide.

Reimagining Urban Resilience In Hatay, our team led by Professors Jacqueline Klopp from the Center for Sustainable Urban Development, Ebru Gencer from the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, and Andrew Kruckiewicz from the International Research Institute for Climate and Society, is pioneering a multi-risk urban planning approach that could transform how cities rebuild after disasters. By integrating seismic and climate risk assessments with social vulnerability factors, we're creating a model for sustainable urban development that prioritizes both physical infrastructure and community needs.

Ensuring Health Equity in Crisis The HEARTS Study, directed by Professor Juliana Bol from Columbia University Irving Medical Center, represents a crucial step forward in understanding how disasters affect vulnerable populations. By examining health challenges faced by refugees in post-earthquake Türkiye, we're developing frameworks to ensure crisis response strategies address the needs of all community members.



Climate Change and Security

Climate Action and Urban Sustainability

Our work on climate resilience highlights the impact of cross-disciplinary collaboration. Through the **Urban Futurity: Navigating Climate and Seismic Resilience** initiative, we united experts from disaster mitigation, urban planning, and climate science to explore integrated strategies for enhancing urban resilience. By addressing critical issues such as sustainable water management, spatial planning, and community-driven solutions, the event underscored the importance of innovative, collaborative approaches to building cities capable of withstanding climate change and seismic risks.

The **Climate and Economy Conference**, organized in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund and the European Climate Foundation, transformed how journalists and policymakers understand the intersection of climate change and economic systems. We equipped journalists with the tools to effectively communicate complex climate economics to diverse audiences.

Our **Climate Change and Security** roundtable focused on the critical link between climate change and global security, creating an interdisciplinary dialogue among scholars, experts, and policymakers. The event concentrated on the ways climate change influences regional security dynamics and global stability. To further engage the public, we have published a comprehensive briefing note, [available on our website](#), which offers deeper insights into the discussions and findings from the event.

Fostering Dialogue Across Boundaries

Voices of Emerging Scholars Led by Prof. Zeynep Çelik and Merve İspahani, PhD, the series continued with a two-day long roundtable at the Istanbul Center with a vibrant group of early-career scholars from Türkiye and the US.

Diplomacy in Action The Foreign Policy and Diplomacy Lecture Series, led by distinguished scholar Soli Özel and the Istanbul Center’s Academic Programs Manager Merve İspahani, brought together diplomats and policy experts to explore Türkiye’s evolving role in global affairs.

Arts as Catalyst for Change The second edition of our ReelLife Film Series—created in dynamic partnership with the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub and Pera Museum—addressed pressing social issues. Post-screening discussions provided a platform for audiences and filmmakers to delve into the complex challenges facing our region.



ReelLife Film Series



Masterclass in Journalism

Preserving Independent Voices

In an era where independent journalism faces unprecedented challenges, our commitment to supporting press freedom took center stage this year. Through two key initiatives, we created vital lifelines for journalists navigating complex professional landscapes.

Our **Journalism in Exile** workshop was more than just a training program—it established a safe space where displaced journalists could rebuild their networks and envision new futures for their craft.

The **Masterclass in Journalism: The Art of Pitching**, organized with the International Press Institute and led by Columbia Journalism School alumna Elif Ince, equipped participants with skills for engaging with and placing their stories with international media outlets. Following the program, participant Melisa Ishbitiren, published an article in The Guardian, demonstrating how regional voices can achieve global reach with the right support.

Strengthening Our Columbia Community

Building the Republic Conference Our two-day conference on the centennial of the Republic of Türkiye, organized with the Sakıp Sabancı Center for Turkish Studies, brought together distinguished scholars from four countries to examine the political, cultural, and social developments from the 1920s to the 1940s. The event attracted over 200 attendees, with more than 20 distinguished speakers, fostering vital discussions about Türkiye's history and future.



Wafaa El Sadr, Columbia Global Executive Vice President, Istanbul visit

Alumni Engagement & Leadership

Our commitment to nurturing the Columbia community in Türkiye flourished through three channels:

Executive Vice President of Columbia Global Wafaa El-Sadr's November 2023 visit to Istanbul catalyzed meaningful exchange, featuring insights from retired Ambassador Ayşe Sinirlioğlu and updates on Columbia Global's vision for the region.

Professional Networks Through the Columbia School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) Türkiye Alumni speaker series, we fostered ongoing dialogue among graduates while strengthening professional connections across sectors.

Community Building Regular alumni gatherings created spaces for meaningful exchange, contributing to critical discussions about Türkiye's future while strengthening the bonds within our Columbia family.

Looking Forward: Strategic Priorities

As we look ahead to 2025, our priorities include:

- Expanding the Global Resilience Fund with a second round of awards
- Strengthening our Voices of Emerging Scholars series
- Providing global learning opportunities for students through our partnership with Columbia Global's Center for Undergraduate Global Engagement
- Enhancing alumni engagement and network building
- Continuing our fundraising efforts to ensure long-term sustainability





Faculty Advisory Committee

Our Team

We sincerely appreciate the dedication and expertise of our **Faculty Advisory Committee** members.

The Istanbul Center’s Faculty Advisory Committee provides academic guidance, leadership, and support for the Center’s activities. It fosters faculty engagement, promotes scholarly exchange, and helps develop innovative and sustainable programming.

Zainab Bahrani Chair, Columbia Global Centers Istanbul Faculty Advisory Committee; Edith Porada Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Art History and Archeology, Department of Art History and Archeology, Columbia University

Zeynep Çelik Sakıp Sabancı Visiting Professor of Turkish Studies, Department of History, Columbia University

Hamid Dabashi Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature, Columbia University

Vishakha Desai Past Chair and Member, Committee on Global Thought, Senior Advisor to EVP for Columbia Global, President Emerita Asia Society, Columbia University

Ebru A. Gencer Adjunct Associate Professor of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, Columbia University

Carol Gluck George Sansom Professor of History, Department of History; Professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures, Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, Columbia University

Ayten Gündoğdu Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Barnard College

Valentina Izmirli Chair, Department of Slavic Languages; Professor of Slavic Languages, Columbia University

Çağhan Kızıl Associate Professor, Department of Neurology and The Taub Institute for Research on Alzheimer’s Disease and the Aging Brain, Columbia University Irving Medical Center

Holger Klein Lisa and Bernard Selz Professor of Medieval Art History and Archaeology, Columbia University

Ahmet Tunç Şen Assistant Professor of Ottoman History, Department of History, Columbia University

İpek Cem Taha Director, ‘93BU, ‘93IA
Merve T. İspahani PhD, Academic Programs Manager, ‘18GSAS
N. Can Kantarcı Communications Manager
Ata Türkoğlu Program Officer
Ceyda Göçmen Özaznavryan Administrative Coordinator
Gülden Çolakel Administrative Officer
Murat Güney Expert-In-Residence, ‘16GSAS

Advisory Board

We are grateful for the commitment and leadership of our Advisory Board members. Your support is vital to the Istanbul Center's success.

The Advisory Board provides oversight and strategic direction for the Center. Composed of distinguished academics, public figures, and business leaders, it strengthens initiatives, fosters partnerships, and ensures long-term growth. The Board meets annually to review progress and offer insights.

Leon Amram '88BU, industrialist, entrepreneur, investor

Tayfun Bayazıt '83BUS, Chairman, Marsh McLennan Group, Turkey; Chairman, Bayazıt Consulting Services

Erol Bilecik P:'22EN, Chairman, Index Group; Former President, TÜSIAD

Prof. M. Kemal Cılız Professor of Electrical Engineering, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul; Former President, TÜBİSAD; Board Member, Turkish Informatics Foundation (TBV); Chairman, Infonet Information Tech. A.Ş

Hanzade Doğan '99BU, Founder and Chairwoman, Hepsiburada Group; Founder and Chairwoman, Nesine; Founder, D4 Ventures; Board Member, Aydın Doğan Foundation

Vuslat Doğan-Sabancı '96IA, Artist; Founder, V Foundation; Board Member, Doğan Holding and Hepsiburada.com

Prof. Üstün Ergüder Chair, Executive Board of Hisar Education Foundation; Honorary Chair, Executive Committee of Education Reform Initiative; Founding Director, Istanbul Policy Center, Sabancı University; Former President, Magna Charta Observatory of Academic Freedom and Institutional Autonomy, Bologna, Italy; Former President, Boğaziçi University

Ahmet O. Evin '66CC, '73GSAS, Founding Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sabancı University; Professor Emeritus, Sabancı University; Senior Scholar, Istanbul Policy Center

His Excellency Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu Academic; Diplomat; 9th Secretary General, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC); Former Member, Turkish Parliament and PACE; Founder and Chairman, History of Science Department, Istanbul University; Founding Director-General, IRCICA; Former President, International Union of History and Philosophy of Science and Technology (IUHPST); Honorary President, Turkish Society for History of Science; Honorary Member, Turkish Academy of Science

Korhan Kurdoglu '91IA, P:'20CC, CEO, Tab Food Investments (TFI)

Emre Kurttepelı '90EN, P:'22EN, Founder and CEO, Vuvy and Vidobu

Elif Özdemir Vice President, Özaltın Holding

Mustafa Erhan Say '84BUS, Founder and Managing Partner, iLab

Ayşe Sinirlioğlu Ambassador (Ret.)

Agah Uğur P:'17CC, P:'19AC, Chairman and Partner, Boğaziçi Ventures

Share in Our Impact



Your involvement strengthens communities, nurtures emerging leaders, and helps create a lasting legacy. Join us in driving meaningful change—locally and globally.