

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 15, 2017

President Donald Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

As you prepare to welcome Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Washington, D.C. tomorrow, we write to express our grave concerns about the continuing erosion of human rights and the dramatic decline of democratic values in Turkey. We urge you to make these issues a priority during your meeting with President Erdogan.

Turkey's democratic identity has long been a part of the U.S.-Turkish relationship and its role in the region. Turkey joined the NATO alliance two years after it held its first competitive election in 1950. Turkey's democracy has been a source of strength for the alliance and a source of stability across the Middle East and the Balkans.

However, over the past several years, Erdogan and his allies have mounted an assault on the rule of law, particularly using sweeping state of emergency authorities to stifle fundamental rights including free speech, undermine the independence of the judiciary, and quash any opposition to their undemocratic actions. They have thrown thousands of Turks in jail, including dozens of journalists, and left many of their citizens and even Americans in Turkey, fearful for their own futures.

We are particularly concerned with the recent constitutional referendum, which suffered from a lack of transparency and lays the groundwork for Erdogan to further undermine democratic institutions. The campaign was held under a state of emergency in a tightly controlled media environment where critical voices from the press and civil society were jailed. Representatives from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, who were tasked with evaluating the legitimacy of the vote itself, assessed that it took place on an "unleveled playing field" and "fundamental freedoms essential to a genuinely democratic process were curtailed."


Journalists continue to be targeted as the Turkish media is subjected to censorship and intimidation by the Erdogan government. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, in 2016, Turkey was the top jailer of journalist worldwide with at least 81 journalist imprisoned. Reporters Without Borders' 2017 World Press Freedom Index, ranks Turkey 155 out of 180 countries of the worst countries for press freedom.


The government has also increased direct threats against political opposition groups and minority communities including ethnic Kurds under the guise of combatting terrorism. According to media reports, the government has continued its crackdown since the April 16 referendum.

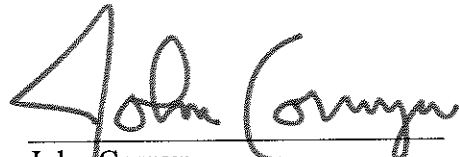
As it is a critical moment for Turkey and the U.S.-Turkish relationship, the United States must be candid and consistent in our support of democratic values and respect for human rights for the sake of Turkey's future and our long-term interests in the region. We therefore urge you to make support for Turkish democracy and human rights a priority, both in your meetings with President Erdogan next week and in U.S. policy toward Turkey thereafter.

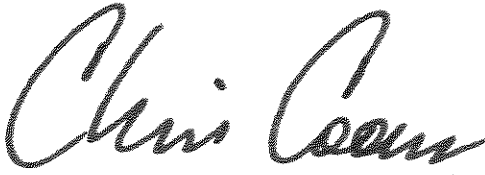
Sincerely,


  
Robert Menendez  
United States Senate

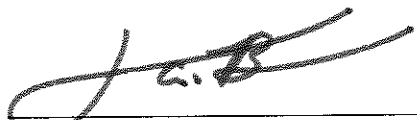
  
Marco Rubio  
United States Senate


  
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senate


  
John Cornyn  
United States Senate

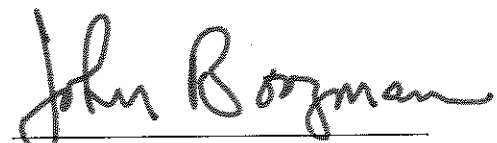
  
Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senate


  
Cory Gardner  
United States Senate

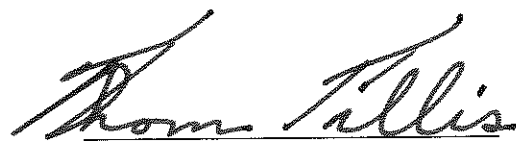
  
Cory A. Booker  
United States Senate


  
Todd Young  
United States Senate

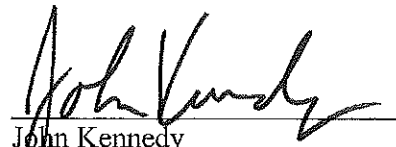
  
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senate

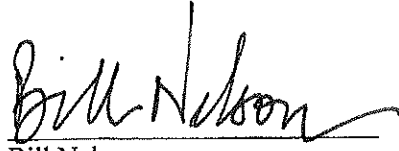
  
John Boozman  
United States Senate


  
Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senate

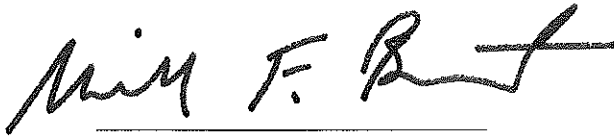
  
Thom Tillis  
United States Senate

  
Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senate

  
John Kennedy  
United States Senate

  
Bill Nelson  
United States Senate

  
Susan M. Collins  
United States Senate

  
Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senate

  
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senate