

JAMES P. MCGOVERN, Massachusetts
Co-Chair



RANDY HULTGREN, Illinois
Co-Chair

One Hundred and Fifteenth Congress
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

December 5, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We write to express our deep concern regarding Turkey's ongoing politically motivated persecution of human rights defenders.

Last June 6th, Turkish authorities detained Mr. Taner Kılıç, the Chair of Amnesty International Turkey, and remanded him to pre-trial detention. On July 5th, Turkish police detained Amnesty International's Turkey Director Ms. İdil Eser, along with nine other human rights defenders, while they were participating in a routine human rights workshop. This is the first time that a Chair and Director of a national Amnesty International branch have been arrested in the history the organization.

Those arrested on July 5th are collectively known as the Istanbul 10 and include some of Turkey's leading human rights figures: Günel Kurşun (*lawyer, Human Rights Agenda Association*), İlknur Üstün (*Women's Coalition*), Nalan Erkem (*lawyer, Citizens Assembly*), Nejat Taştan (*Equal Rights Watch Association*), Özlem Dalkıran (*Citizens' Assembly*), Şeyhmuz Özbekli (*lawyer*), and Veli Acu (*Human Rights Agenda Association*). In addition, two foreign trainers were also arrested, Peter Steudtner, a German national, and Ali Gharavi, a Swedish national. Eight of the ten were remanded to pre-trial detention. All those arrested are indicted on the charge of "membership of a terrorist organization." If convicted, they face sentences of up to 15 years imprisonment.

On October 25th, after more than 100 days of pre-trial detention, a court ordered the jailed Istanbul 10 rights defenders to be released on bail. But the next day, Taner Kılıç's pre-trial detention was extended in a separate hearing.

The charges against the two senior Amnesty International officials and other human rights defenders are baseless. They were arrested merely for doing their work protecting the rights of others who are imprisoned and tortured. Their arrests represent a dangerous escalation in the ongoing attacks on fundamental human rights and civil society in Turkey following a failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016.

To date, at least 50,000 people have been imprisoned pending trial and more than 100,000 public sector employees have been summarily dismissed since the coup attempt. The authorities have targeted critical voices in the media and civil society: at least 130 journalists and media workers have been detained, and more than a hundred media outlets have been closed. Hundreds of NGOs have been shut down.

If these prosecutions are allowed to move forward without a clear response from the United States government, a precedent will be set that will not only threaten the legitimate work of Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, but will also embolden authoritarian regimes around the world. The Turkish government must understand that business as usual cannot continue under these conditions. The costs for human rights in Turkey – and for human rights around the world – will be immensely and unacceptably high.

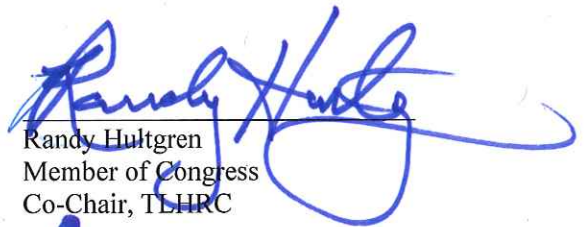
Together, we urge you to publicly call on the Government of Turkey to halt the prosecution of these human rights defenders, drop all charges against them, and immediately and unconditionally release those still in detention, including Mr. Kılıç.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, TLHRC



Randy Hultgren
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, TLHRC



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



Ted Poe
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



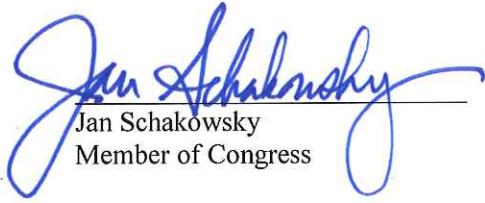
Trent Franks
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

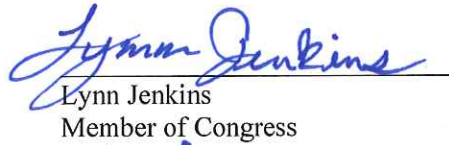


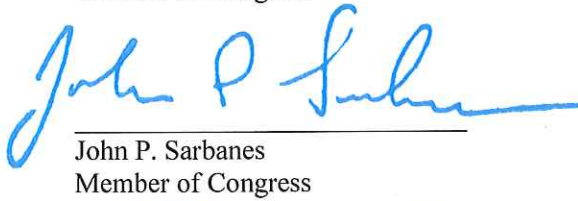
Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress

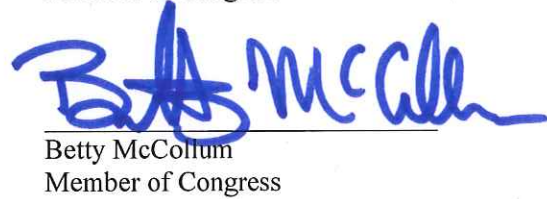

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

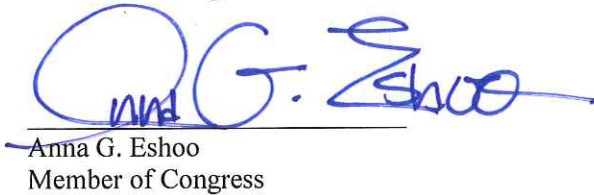

Peter King
Member of Congress

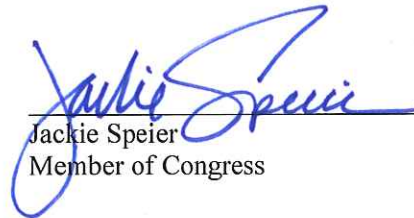

Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Lynn Jenkins
Member of Congress

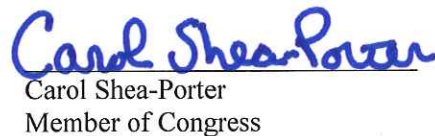

John P. Sarbanes
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Betty McCollum
Member of Congress


Anna G. Eshoo
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Jackie Speier
Member of Congress


Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

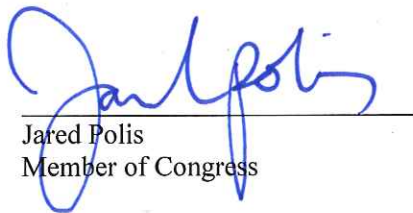

Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress

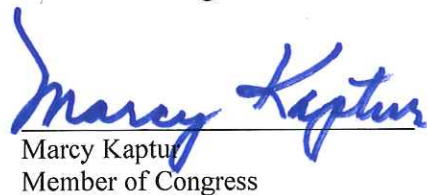

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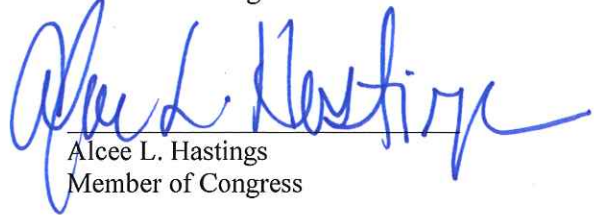
David Scott
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Chellie Pingree
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Zoe Lofgren
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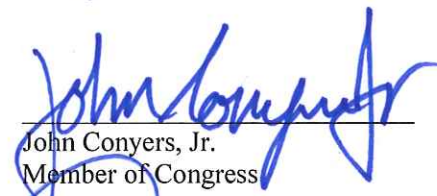
Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



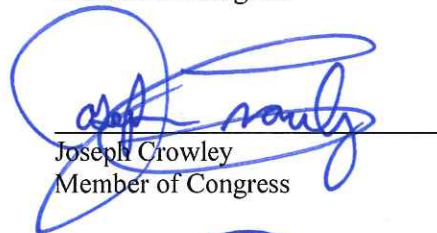
Grace Meng
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Carolyn B. Maloney
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John Conyers, Jr.
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Joseph Crowley
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Mark Pocan
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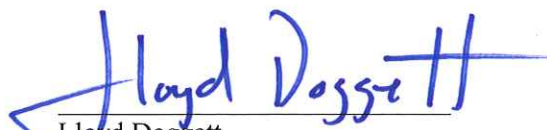
Jim Costa
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Keith Ellison
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Raúl Grijalva
Member of Congress



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



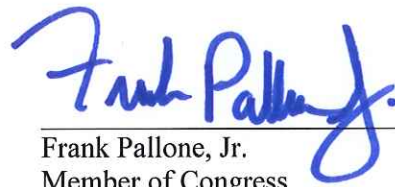
Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress



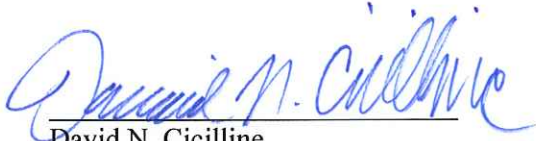
Louise Slaughter
Member of Congress



Daniel W. Lipinski
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

Cc: Secretary of State Rex Tillerson