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One Hundred Sixteenth Congress  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
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Washington, DC 20515  
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June 11, 2020

His Excellency Recep Tayyip Erdoğan  
President  
Republic of Turkey

Dear President Erdoğan:

While we firmly believe that Turkey is a valuable NATO ally and that the relationship between the United States and Turkey is an important one, it is imperative that NATO members live up to the alliance's foundational values. Above all, we must ensure that human rights, democratic freedoms, and the rule of law are protected. That is why we write to you out of deep concern for the way the Turkish government has implemented policies intended to reduce the spread of COVID-19 among incarcerated populations.

We have long been concerned about the abuse of certain severe criminal charges in Turkey in order to suppress journalists, civil society activists, and members of the political opposition who do not appear to have committed any criminal acts. This misapplication of serious criminal charges appears to have contributed to a ballooning population in Turkey's prisons. Now, these individuals find themselves in environments that are particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19 due to overcrowding and an inability to maintain proper distancing.

We believe your government has recognized the extraordinary threat posed to incarcerated populations – which is why it has taken the practical step of releasing some prisoners to reduce the risk of spread. However, we are deeply troubled that the prison release policies enacted by the Turkish Parliament —because they barred the release of those detained on charges of terrorism, treason, or violating Turkey's intelligence law, as well as those in pre-trial detention – intentionally exclude these journalists, activists, and political opposition figures from consideration for release. And while we understand the need to exercise caution with such a release policy, we urge you to give these journalists, civil society activists, and political

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opposition figures the same treatment as others who have been released to house arrest to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

As NATO allies, it is more important than ever that we work together to safeguard both the interests and the values of the alliance during this challenging time. To that end, we hope that you and your government will look to ensure equitable application of release policies and reject the abuse of severe criminal penalties to suppress criticism and opposition in the future.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



ELIOT L. ENGEL  
Chairman



WILLIAM R. KEATING  
Chairman  
House Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia,  
Energy, and the Environment