April 20, 2018

Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan
President
The Republic of Turkey

Mr. President,

It has now been over a year and a half since Turkish authorities detained Pastor Andrew Brunson, a law-abiding American citizen resident in Turkey since 1993, for alleged involvement in terrorism.

Pastor Brunson’s detention and formal arrest followed the Turkish government’s imposition of a State of Emergency after a violent coup attempt in July 2016 rightly opposed by Turks across the political spectrum. The United States has condemned the coup and respects the legitimate efforts of the Turkish government to ensure its perpetrators face justice and the Turkish nation is protected from any repetition of the coup attempt. The Senate supports the ongoing efforts to strengthen law enforcement cooperation between U.S. agencies and their Turkish counterparts, including with regard to investigating alleged participants in the coup plot.

However, we are deeply disturbed that the Turkish government has gone beyond legitimate action against the coup plotters to undermine Turkey’s own rule of law and democratic traditions. Under the State of Emergency, tens of thousands of Turkey’s own citizens as well as some citizens of the United States and other countries have been arrested, dismissed from employment or otherwise seen their lives destroyed on vague charges and dubious evidence. These actions by the government of Turkey are inconsistent with the commitment to law and justice that have historically been hallmarks of Turkish democracy.

That the Turkish government has consistently ignored bipartisan expressions of concern from the Congress has also been cause for concern. Nonetheless, we chose to respect the working of the Turkish judicial system and await a just outcome.

On March 13th, 2018 Turkish authorities issued an indictment alleging and purportedly detailing Pastor Brunson’s offenses. It is an absurd collection of anonymous accusations, flights of fantasy, and random character assassination. It is an insult not only to an unjustly imprisoned individual, but to the traditions of Turkish jurisprudence. That a Turkish court could accept such a document as the basis for prosecution removes any shred of doubt that Andrew Brunson, like other American citizens as well as Turkish employees of the U.S. Government detained under the State of Emergency, is being used as a political pawn by elements of the Turkish government bent on destroying the longstanding partnership between two great nations. Moreover, the suggestion in the indictment that the actions of Pastor Brunson to explain his religious convictions to others was somehow meant to undermine the Turkish state brings a new and deeply disturbing dimension to the case. It should trouble all Turks justly proud of Turkey’s centuries-old tradition of welcoming believers of all faiths.
The United States Government, and millions of Americans deeply concerned by the Brunson case, have been patient, in the hope that justice would be done and Pastor Brunson would be reunited with his family. The signatories of this letter have concluded that other measures will be necessary to ensure that the Government of Turkey respects the right of law-abiding citizens and employees of the United States to travel to, reside in, and work in Turkey without fear of persecution.

Sincerely,

Thom Tillis  
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

Bob Corker  
United States Senator

Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

Richard Burr  
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

Orrin G. Hatch  
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

John Cornyn  
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

Chuck Grassley  
United States Senator

Bill Nelson  
United States Senator
Lamar Alexander
United States Senator

Richard Shelby
United States Senator

Pat Roberts
United States Senator

John Thune
United States Senator

James M. Inhofe
United States Senator

Johnny Isakson
United States Senator

Lamar Alexander
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

Lindsey G. Graham
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator
Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senator

Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

Dan Sullivan  
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

Mike Crapo  
United States Senator

Doug Jones  
United States Senator

Marco Rubio  
United States Senator

Jon Tester  
United States Senator

Tom Cotton  
United States Senator

Claire McCaskill  
United States Senator

Shelley Moore Capito  
United States Senator

Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

Roy Blunt  
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

Joni K. Ernst  
United States Senator

David A. Perdue  
United States Senator
Jeff Flake
United States Senator

Ben Sasse
United States Senator

Ted Cruz
United States Senator

John Boozman
United States Senator

Tim Scott
United States Senator

Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator

James E. Risch
United States Senator

Steve Daines
United States Senator

Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator

John Hoeven
United States Senator

Dean Heller
United States Senator

Cory Gardner
United States Senator

Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator

Todd Young
United States Senator

John Kennedy
United States Senator

Deb Fisher
United States Senator
Jerry Moran  
United States Senator

Ron Johnson  
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

Rob Portman  
United States Senator

Tina Smith  
United States Senator

Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator