

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 29, 2020

His Excellency Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow
President of Turkmenistan
Oguzkhan Presidential Palace
Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Dear President Berdimuhamedow:

We are writing to request that you release detainees currently serving sentences for peacefully expressing their views, including members of student groups, activists, and human rights defenders. Individuals should never be imprisoned for exercising their rights of freedom of assembly, association, and speech, and we urge you to release without preconditions your citizens currently in detention for these legitimate acts.

We call for releasing these individuals on the merits of their cases, but today, we also urge you to act quickly on health and humanitarian grounds. While all nations and citizens have been affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic, the risks to the detainee population are particularly acute given the enclosed living conditions. Our own country, like many others, has taken the extraordinary step to grant some prisoners early release in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19. This move allows facilities to increase their ability to follow social distancing recommendations and ensure standards of medical care for the remaining population.

We encourage you to seize this opportunity during this global crisis by releasing these individuals. While we write regarding all individuals detained in relation to acts of peaceful expression, we draw your attention to three cases in particular:

First, we understand that **Omruzak Omarkulyev**, a citizen of Turkmenistan who had formed a Turkmen student group while studying abroad in Turkey, was, according to unconfirmed reports, arrested in 2018 and sentenced to 20 years in prison on unknown charges. We have reviewed a September 2019 video that claims Mr. Omarkulyev is serving his mandatory two-year military service, though we have been unable to confirm whether this is in fact the case. You may be aware that the U.S. Department of State included his case in its Human Rights Report on Turkmenistan in the section regarding political prisoners and detainees. We call for his immediate release.

Second, we reiterate the contents of our May 2019 letter to you regarding **Gulgeldy Annaniyazov**, who has been detained since 2008. Mr. Annaniyazov was arrested after returning from Norway and sentenced to 11 years for illegal entry and theft of an official document, though he had also previously served prison time for organizing a peaceful demonstration. We understand that authorities are now subjecting him to five years in a city lockdown setting (“living in a designated area”), establishing his new date for unhindered movement in 2024. The U.S. Department of State has included his case in its Human Rights Report on Turkmenistan, and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has called on your government to release him and award compensation. We call for his immediate release.

Finally, we bring your attention to the case of **Mansur Mingelov**, a citizen arrested alongside his brother in June 2012 on drug charges. Following his detention, Mr. Mingelov lodged an official complaint that his brother had been tortured in detention. As a result, police officers threatened him with prosecution and rearrested him in August on drug-related charges. He was sentenced to 22 years in prison the following month for the production and distribution of pornography, contraband, and drugs (Articles 156,164, 254 and 292 of the Criminal Code). He is currently serving a 22-year prison sentence with a planned release date of 2032. According to Amnesty International he recently suffered from tuberculosis, a condition that may make him more vulnerable to COVID-19. We call for his immediate release.

In addition to these and other known cases of individuals detained for peacefully expressing their views, we are concerned about reports of enforced disappearances in Turkmenistan. In December 1992, after Turkmenistan joined the UN, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The Declaration proclaims that “[a]ny act of enforced disappearance is an offence to human dignity” and “[s]tates shall act at the national and regional levels and in cooperation with the United Nations to contribute by all means to the prevention and eradication of enforced disappearance.” We understand that the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) has requested an invitation to visit Turkmenistan since November 2016. In addition to releasing people detained for peacefully expressing their views, we urge you to invite the WGEID to Turkmenistan so they can support your government in implementing international standards on preventing enforced or involuntary disappearances.

We thank you for your consideration of our requests and urge swift action on these cases.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Mitt Romney
United States Senator



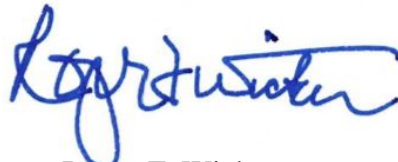
Richard J. Durbin
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Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.


Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
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Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator