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COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

April 29, 2015

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

I write to express my deep concern about the persistence of human rights violations in Turkey. I am particularly concerned by the continued detainment of members of the Turkish media and efforts by the government to censor the freedom of press. As you know, a strong democracy requires all members of society respect the freedom of expression, even when voices opposed to the government are vocal. The continued willingness to take steps to limit freedom of expression, restrict freedom of assembly, erode human rights and the rule of law in Turkey is unacceptable and I hope that you will address this issue as you engage with the Turkish government.

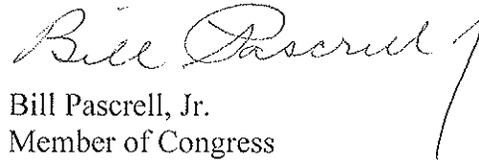
According to the Human Rights Watch's 25th annual World Report, the Turkish government intensified its interference in the criminal justice system, reassigned judges, prosecutors, and police, and clamped down on Internet freedom. The report went so far as to say, "Readiness to limit freedom of expression, restrictive approach to freedom of assembly, and readiness to prosecute demonstrators while tolerating police violence against them, were among features most damaging to Turkey's democratic credentials and international reputation during the year." These actions have had, and continue to have, a chilling effect on news coverage in Turkey.

The Administration has attracted international attention in recent months with the arrest of Ekrem Dumanli, editor-in-chief of Zaman, a highly circulated daily newspaper in Turkey, and Hidayet Karaca, CEO of Samanyolu Media Group. On December 14, 2014, these members of the media were arrested and detained on questionable charges. Mr. Dumanli has since been released, but Mr. Karaca unfortunately remains detained. Both Mr. Dumanli and Mr. Karaca lead major news organizations that have been critical of the government and covered allegations of corruption. Earlier this week, when a three judge panel recommended the release of Mr. Karaca, the government suspended these judges, adding concern about meddling in the judiciary to this troubling case.

New Jersey's Ninth Congressional District is home to one of the largest Turkish-American communities in the country, and while many in the community have a close relationship to their homeland, they have shared concern with recent happenings in Turkey. As a strategic ally to the United States in the Middle East, and key member of NATO, I wish to see the Turkish government abandon this course of intimidation and embrace a free press which includes dissenting voices. It should be a priority of the United States to encourage the Turkish

government to fulfill the responsibilities and obligations to their own people. As a result, I urge you to speak up in defense of democratic ideals such as freedom of speech, free press and free expression to create a more tolerant atmosphere for the media in Turkey.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill Pascrell, Jr.". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress