



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Human Rights In Turkey Today

Tuesday, June 10, 2025

2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

2255 Rayburn House Office Building

Co-Chair James P. McGovern

As prepared for delivery

Good afternoon and welcome to this afternoon's Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing on the human rights situation in Turkey.

I welcome the opportunity to get an update from our witnesses on conditions in Turkey since the Commission's hearing last year. I note that the United Nations has accepted the country's request to use the term "Türkiye," but I will use "Turkey" today for ease of communication.

The State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* identifies a record of enforced disappearance, torture, arbitrary detention, lack of judicial independence, political prisoners, and transnational repression.

Last month, 58 international human rights NGOs, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, wrote an open letter portraying the arrest of Istanbul mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu as a "major escalation" in the actions by the Erdoğan government to silence dissenting voices, including political opponents, Kurdish politicians, journalists, civil society activists and human rights defenders.

Among the charges levied against İmamoğlu was complicity in "terrorism." He denies these charges, which were also condemned by the Council of Europe, the German government and human rights groups.

As the State Department reports, "[t]he government frequently responded to expression critical of it by filing criminal charges alleging affiliation with terrorist groups, terrorism, or otherwise endangering the state, citing national security grounds."

Turkey is but one of too many cases around the world where counter-terrorism laws are wrongly invoked to suppress critics and to violate the fundamental human rights of its citizens. I hope to hear today's witnesses expand on this issue.

As we have discussed previously in this Commission, Turkey is both an origin country and a host country for transnational repression. Refugee and diaspora communities who reside in Turkey, including vulnerable Uyghurs, are targeted by foreign governments. The Turkish government itself has reached across borders to repress, intimidate and seek to silence those who don't align with the leader's ideology. I welcome hearing our witnesses speak to their personal experiences and those within their communities.

I note that the Commission's next hearing, in two weeks, will be a global look at transnational repression to examine trends and assess the US. Government's "whole of government" approach to addressing this menace.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in March that he raised the case of Mayor İmamoğlu with his Turkish counterpart while noting the need for "balance" in our policy, citing the wide policy interests that the United States has with Turkey. He sounds little different than his predecessors.

This is my frustration with how our government, under Administrations of both parties, have approached policy toward Turkey: human rights considerations, including transnational repression, rarely are prioritized.

I worry that Secretary Rubio's reorganization of the State Department will make it worse. By eliminating the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor as a full standing bureau, and by intentionally folding human rights work into the regional offices, whose mission is to manage bilateral relations, his plan will re-institutionalize a structure in which political considerations always overrule human rights matters. I urge the House Foreign Affairs Committee to reject this plan.

Our government has plenty of leverage with the Turkish government to insist that it abide by rulings of its Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights; that it stop the crackdown on a free press; that it cease targeting critics abroad; that it release prisoners of conscience, including Selahattin Demirtaş, a politician and human rights lawyer detained on yet another specious "terrorism" charge. Our distinguished colleague and Executive Committee member Congressman Jamie Raskin advocates for his release in the Defending Freedoms Project.

The challenges we see in Turkey today – transnational repression, quashing of freedom of expression, anti-terrorism as a pretext for repression, defiance of the rule of law – are sadly too common around the world. Like every government, including our own, Turkey is required to comply with its human rights obligations fully, and not ignore them when it's inconvenient or bothersome.

The people of Turkey, regardless of ethnic or religious background, have fundamental rights that those who govern them must respect. That is our message today.

Thank you and I yield back.

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