



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

### **Hearing Notice**

# **Can Turkey Find Its Way Back to Freedom?** **Authoritarian Consolidation versus the Defense of Turkish Democracy**

**Wednesday, June 3, 2026**  
**2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.**  
**2128 Longworth House Office Building**

**Co-Chair James P. McGovern**

### **As delivered**

Good afternoon and welcome to this afternoon's Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing on Turkey.

Hillary Clinton famously said it takes a village. I want to say it takes a bigger hearing room. I can't believe all the people that are here, It shows the deep concern for what is happening in Turkey today.

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.

This is the third year in a row we have held a hearing on Turkey. These snapshots give us an opportunity to assess trends in human rights and democracy.

My impression is that things are getting worse. Human Rights Watch's 2026 report finds that the government of President Erdoğan "consolidated its authoritarian trajectory with an unprecedented onslaught on the main political opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) that threatened freedom of political association and free and fair elections."

Amnesty International reports that the government weaponizes the criminal justice system against journalists. According to the Journalists Union of Türkiye, 14 journalists and other media workers were in prison as of March 2026. Many more face intimidation.

I hope our witnesses will update and analyze these trends.

The government continues to refuse to adhere to binding judgments of the European Court of Human Rights to address serious human rights violations.

I ask our witnesses to tell us why the Turkish government feels empowered to ignore its obligations.

The announcement for this hearing asks for “policy options available to the United States and Congress in support of democracy and human rights.” But I wonder whether that is even possible anymore.

How do we ask the Executive Branch to defend democracy in Turkey when the Trump Administration eliminated democracy promotion as a component of foreign policy?

How do we ask the President to promote human rights in Turkey when his National Security Strategy doesn’t mention the words “human rights” even once?

How can we expect the Administration to counter authoritarian consolidation in Turkey when the ruling party is actively and willingly consolidating authoritarianism in the United States?

The V-Dem Institute’s Democracy Report for 2026 assesses that the slide of autocratization in the U.S. has been more than twice as steep as Turkey’s. The U.S. had the 8<sup>th</sup> biggest decline in its aggregate freedom score in Freedom House’s 2026 report.

How can we credibly criticize the Turkish government’s crackdown on political opposition when our Justice Department “is ramping up efforts to investigate and prosecute President Trump’s perceived enemies,” according to the new Wall Street Journal investigation that lists more than four dozen people targeted as Trump opponents?

How do we call out Turkey for jailing journalists when our federal government is prosecuting reporters like Don Lemon and Georgia Fort?

How can we convince Turkey to release Selahattin Demirtaş, a prisoner of conscience jailed on a specious “terrorism” charge, when President Trump issues orders to prosecute domestic civil society groups as “terrorist organizations?”

Let me be clear. I stand with the witnesses here, and with many others, in wanting the government of Turkey to respect human rights and allow its citizens to enjoy their democratic freedoms. That is our message today. We are unified in that message.

My concern is that we, on the United States side, are undermining our capacity to advocate for the people of Turkey.

We often say that the problem is a matter of will. I am worried that the problem now is more fundamental. It is a matter of ideology.

I am going to continue to call for the people of Turkey to be able to exercise their fundamental rights under international human rights law. I join with Co-Chair Smith in not backing away from that one iota. These rights are universal and apply equally to the people of Turkey, China, El Salvador, the United States, and everywhere else.

To erode the foundation of this system for one erodes it for all.

I thank the witnesses for being here. I thank the members of the audience, many of whom I have met over the years, for your courage and your bravery in speaking truth to power. I know that even though you are in the United States, that doesn't mean that you can escape intimidation from the Turkish government. I know you have family members in Turkey who are under great pressure for the advocacy that you adhere to here in the United States. I honor your commitment to human rights. I honor your courage. You give me hope. You're an inspiration.

I look forward to the witness' testimony, and with that I yield back.