



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing

Turkey: Post-Election Human Rights and Strategies for Accountability

Wednesday, September 26, 2018

1:00 – 2:00 PM

2325 Rayburn House Office Building

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Good afternoon and thank you all for attending today's Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission briefing on *Turkey: Post-Election Human Rights and Strategies for Accountability*. I would like to thank our esteemed panelists for joining us, and In Defense of Christians for moderating the discussion.

Over the past couple of years, Turkey's actions on the world stage and within their own borders has caused a common outcry from democratic leaders, human rights organizations, and all who believe in the importance of individual universal rights such as freedom of belief, freedom of expression, and the right to due process and a fair trial.

It is estimated that over 50,000 people remain in pretrial detention in Turkey since the failed coup attempt of 2016, including journalists, lawyers, judges, human rights defenders, teachers, academics, and NGO workers. As you are all aware, imprisoned American citizens include Pastor Andrew Brunson and NASA physicist Serkan Golge. Turkey's purge has even extended to three United States foreign service nationals who worked in U.S. diplomatic facilities.

As a member of the Science Committee, I would like to take a moment to highlight the plight of NASA scientist Serkan Golge. Serkan received his Ph.D. in physics from Old Dominion University and then moved to Houston where he was working on a Mars-related exploration project examining the effects of radiation on astronauts. In July of 2016, Serkan was on a family vacation in Turkey with his wife and two children when he was arrested by the Turkish government and accused of being affiliated with the planning of the coup attempt. Serkan has now been detained for over two years.

The charges against Serkan lack any credibility and are similar to those leveled against Pastor Brunson, a peaceful man of faith who has selflessly served the Turkish people for over 20 years. We will continue to raise these cases and call for their immediate release. I find it

particularly unacceptable that these actions are being perpetrated by a government that is a strong ally of the United States and a vital member of NATO.

I look forward to hearing what recommendations come out of this briefing, and what strategies are available to the United States and Congress for holding Turkey accountable for mass arbitrary detainment and multiple other human rights violations.

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