

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 22, 2019

His Excellency Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow  
Oguzkhan Presidential Palace  
Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Dear President Berdimuhamedow:

Over the years, we have written to you regarding political prisoners jailed in Turkmenistan. We appreciate that your government hosted our staff when visiting your nation to discuss these cases and your help in resolving a number of them. Yet, we remain concerned about the long-standing case of Gulgeldy Annaniyazov, who has been held on questionable charges since 2008 and whose sentence was to end this year. In particular, we are troubled by reports that his sentence may have arbitrarily been extended another five years and strongly urge his release this year as originally expected.

Mr. Annaniyazov was originally arrested in 1995 for helping organize a peaceful demonstration highlighting economic hardships and calling for greater democratic freedoms. He was released after serving four years of his fifteen year sentence, but after living under subsequent surveillance, he fled to Kazakhstan in 2002 and eventually resettled in Norway, where he was granted refugee status with his family. He returned to Turkmenistan in 2008 and was arrested shortly thereafter and sentenced to 11 years for illegal entry. Numerous groups including Human Rights Watch, Freedom Now, and Prove They are Alive have raised serious and troubling concerns about his charges and sentence. Similarly, he is regularly mentioned in the U.S. State Department's annual Human Rights Report on Turkmenistan as one of more than 100 politically motivated disappearances. And in 2013, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found "the deprivation of liberty of Gulgeldy Annaniyazov is arbitrary and in contravention of articles 9, 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of articles 9, 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" and called for his release and compensation.

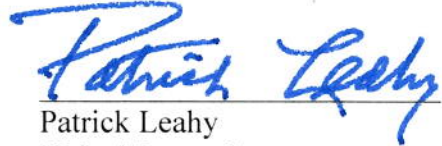
Despite these calls for his release and the UN Working Group's sweeping decision, his family reportedly had not seen him since 2008 until finally allowed to visit him earlier this year to bring him clothes and food. In fact, for many years, his fate was unknown as he was held incommunicado. We believe he was recently transferred to the town of Karabogaz for continued detention, but we are troubled by the lack of information on his wellbeing and release. Quite simply, Mr. Annaniyazov has suffered enough and allowing his immediate release and the option to rejoin his wife and son in Norway would be a most welcome gesture.

Thank you for your attention to these issues.

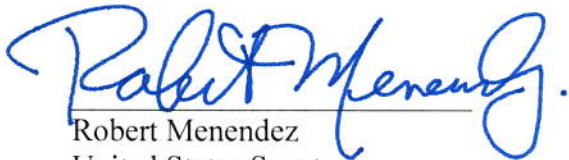
Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator



Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator