

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 5, 2010

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We write to request your help in addressing the continued detention in Turkmenistan of journalists Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadzhev and civic activist Gulgeldy Annaniyazov. A number of us wrote to Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in December about these detainees, all of whom have been characterized as prisoners of conscience by several human rights groups. We remain deeply concerned about the treatment and detention of these individuals and ask that their cases be raised at the highest levels in upcoming bilateral consultations with the Turkmenistan government.

Mr. Amanklychev and Mr. Khadzhev, both members of the human rights group the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation, were arrested in 2006. At that time, they were reportedly helping French journalists film a documentary on Turkmenistan. Government officials later said that they were “gathering slanderous information to spread public discontent.” These individuals, who have now been imprisoned for nearly four years, were not informed of the criminal charges against them until nearly one month after their arrests and were not allowed to call witnesses during their brief trial.

Mr. Annaniyazov, a long-time political dissident, served four years in prison during the 1990s for participating in “anti-government” demonstrations. After his release, he moved to Norway as a political refugee. While reportedly visiting family in Turkmenistan in 2008, Mr. Annaniyazov was arrested on the basis that he did not possess valid travel documents and possibly other undisclosed charges. He has been held incommunicado since receiving an 11 year sentence following a closed trial in October 2008.

According to Turkmenistan’s constitution, all citizens enjoy freedom of association, freedom of press, and freedom of speech. In addition, the constitution guarantees criminal defendants the right to be promptly notified of charges against them, the right to present a defense, and the right to a public trial. Messrs. Annaniyazov, Amanklychev and Khadzhev’s arrests, trials, and ongoing detentions fall short of Turkmenistan and international standards for due process of law. Their detentions also raise concerns about political intimidation in Turkmenistan.

Under President Berdimuhamedow's leadership, Turkmenistan has taken a few steps to improve its human rights record, including releasing political prisoner Mukhametikuli Aymuradov and pardoning many other prisoners who were detained during his predecessor's period in office. The release of Messrs. Annaniyazov, Amanklychev, and Khadzhiyev would be another important step in that process.

We thank you for your assistance in this important matter.

Sincerely,




Senator Richard J. Durbin



Senator Sam Brownback



Senator Benjamin L. Cardin



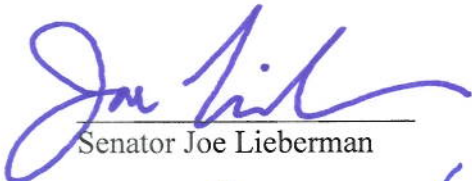
Senator John Kerry



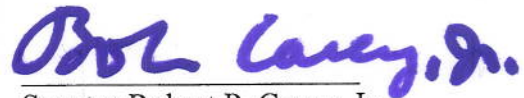
Senator Patrick Leahy



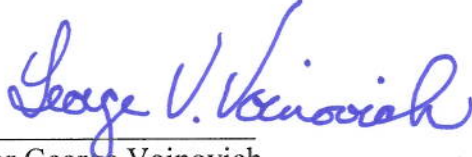
Senator Carl Levin



Senator Joe Lieberman



Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr.



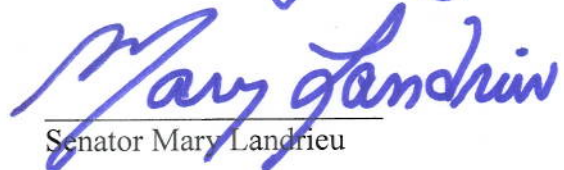
Senator George Voinovich



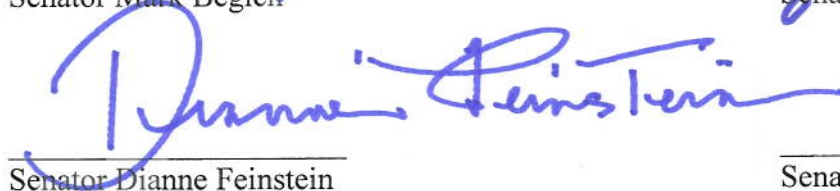
Senator Robert Menendez



Senator Mark Begich



Senator Mary Landrieu



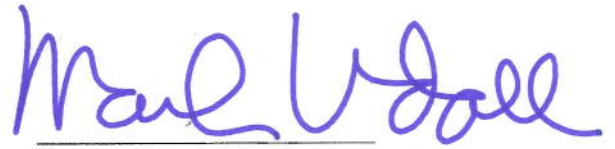
Senator Dianne Feinstein



Senator Arlen Specter



Senator Chris Dodd



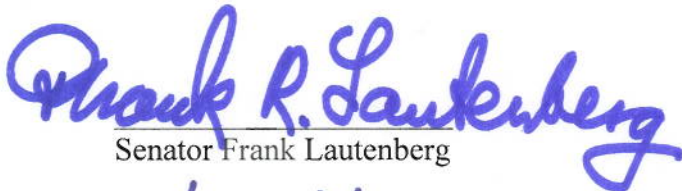
Senator Mark Udall



Senator Evan Bayh



Senator Bernie Sanders



Senator Frank Lautenberg



Senator Sherrod Brown



Senator Herb Kohl