

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 5, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We urge you to impose sanctions immediately on the Turkish government officials responsible for the wrongful detention of locally employed staff at U.S. diplomatic missions in Turkey, as required by law.

The State Department recently provided a report to Congress on the status of Metin Topuz, Mete Canturk, and Hamza Ulucay -- three Turkish citizens who have served at U.S. missions in Turkey since the 1980's. The Department stated that the Turkish government has detained all of these individuals on "unsubstantiated charges related to work they carried out in the course of their official duties on behalf of the U.S. government."

Metin Topuz, detained in 2017, could face life in prison for dubious charges of "attempting to overthrow the government." Mete Canturk, arrested in 2018 and subject to a travel ban, faces spurious criminal charges of membership in the "Fetullah Terrorist Organization." Hamza Ulucay – who spent two years in prison and is banned from leaving the country – could face additional imprisonment under false allegations of terrorism. The Department reported that, in each of these cases, the charges against the individuals were "specious and politically motivated."

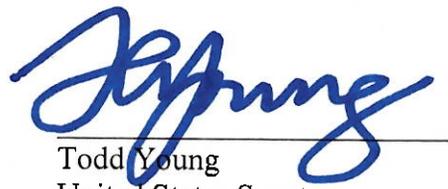
The Congress has mandated visa bans on foreign officials credibly involved, directly or indirectly, in the wrongful detention of locally employed staff of a U.S. diplomatic mission, specifically in Turkey. Section 7031(c) of division G of the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, which applies to all foreign countries, states that "[o]fficials of foreign governments and their immediate family members about whom the Secretary of State has credible information have been involved, directly or indirectly, in...a gross violation of human rights shall be ineligible for entry into the United States." The accompanying report, Senate Report 116-126, notes that the term "gross violation of human rights" shall include unjust or wrongful detention, and such report includes the following requirement:

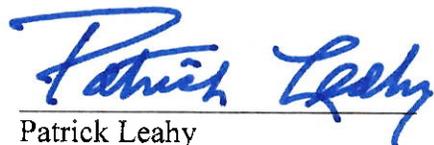
“Prohibition on Entry.--... In addition, the Secretary shall apply [Section 7031(c)] to officials of the Governments of Turkey, Egypt, or Saudi Arabia about whom the Secretary has credible information have been involved in the wrongful detention of locally employed staff of a U.S. diplomatic mission or a U.S. citizen or national.”

The United States relies on the support of locally employed staff of U.S. diplomatic missions abroad. They form the backbone of our conduct of foreign affairs and are vital in ensuring the safety and security of our diplomats. The United States must send a strong, public signal to Turkey, and other countries, that it will not tolerate the abuse of foreign nationals serving the U.S. government. A failure to do so could severely hamper the recruitment and retention of locally employed staff. We therefore call on you to apply section 7031(c) immediately.

Sincerely,


Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator


Todd Young
United States Senator


Patrick Leahy
United States Senator