Date

Dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_:

We write you today with great concern over the human rights of women and children currently imprisoned in Turkey.

As you are aware, recent reports from the Journalist and Writers Foundation in Turkey and the Stockholm Center for Freedom have estimated the number of women in Turkish prisons is a staggering 17,000 along with over 660 children[[1]](#footnote-1). Official records indicate that 23 percent of these children are infants less than a year old[[2]](#footnote-2). Dr. Alan Mendoza, executive director of the Henry Jackson Society (a British foreign policy think tank) said "prison is no place for children in any civilized country".

These reports have questioned the basis for the detainment and imprisonment of these women, as well as the timing of their arrests, in some cases shortly after giving birth. Many of these women have been held without charges being pressed and without access to legal representation, and in some cases, access to their family.

Reports from within Turkey have shown images of security officials waiting outside hospital rooms for mothers to be discharged in order to detain them and their newborn children. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said that one of the most alarming findings of the UN report is “is how Turkish authorities reportedly detained some 100 women who were pregnant or had just given birth, mostly on the grounds that they were ‘associates’ of their husbands, who are suspected of being connected to terrorist organizations. Some were detained with their children and others violently separated from them. This is simply outrageous, utterly cruel, and surely cannot have anything whatsoever to do with making the country safer.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

 With the critical need of preventing bacteria during a child’s first months, questions about the conditions of the prisons where these women are held with their newborn children have also arisen in numerous media reports. A relative of a woman imprisoned in South-East Turkey told OHCHR: “My daughter has been jailed for a year on a made-up charge of support to terrorism. With her is her 13 month-old infant who has anaemia and a lung disease that requires him to spend a lot of time in fresh air, which is impossible in prison.” In another case, the mother of a prematurely born baby was removed from hospital after giving birth and taken to a prison 660 kilometers away, despite medical reports that the health of her baby, who could not be moved from the hospital incubator, was at risk unless breastfed by the mother[[4]](#footnote-4)

Since "extra food, books, phone calls, trips to the hospital, and bathroom supplies are all added to inmates’ prison bills" some women with poor financial situation cannot afford basic hygienic items such as sanitary pads (which they are not provided)[[5]](#footnote-5).

The prison conditions are not satisfactory for the well being of women, and especially children. They are forced to stay in overcrowded rooms, denied health care, missing fresh air and have to share bed and meal.

Many inmates sleep on the floor. Human Rights Association (IHD) has stated that in Turkey, 1025 prisoners are in poor health, 357 of which are seriously ill[[6]](#footnote-6). Nonetheless, at a parliamentary hearing it was revealed that at least five women have suspiciously died at the women's prison in Kocaeli's Gebze district[[7]](#footnote-7).

We wholeheartedly condemn this violation of basic human rights of not only the imprisoned women, but also these children who are being subjected to a life behind bars without cause.

We urge you to bring this matter up in Congress, and reach out to President Erdogan and his administration and his government to release these political prisoners and their children from prison. We also urge you to pressure President Erdogan and his government to immediately improve the prison conditions.

Sincerely,

1. Journalists and Writers Foundation Reports, Women’s Rights Under Attack in Turkey (May 2017), p.41, para.4 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.foxnews.com/world/2018/02/13/hundreds-young-turkish-children-jailed-alongside-their-moms-as-part-post-coup-crackdown.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22853&LangID=E [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/TR/2018-03-19\_Second\_OHCHR\_Turkey\_Report.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Crackdown: Prison conditions worsen in post-Coup Turkey.” IRIN, 7 September 2017, www.irinnews.org/investigations/2017/09/06/crackdown-prison-conditions-worsen-post-coup-turkey. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://turkeypurge.com/1025-turkish-prisons-poor-health-357-seriously-ill-rights-group [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Journalists and Writers Foundation Reports, Women’s Rights Under Attack in Turkey (May 2017), p.53, para.5 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)