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March 8, 2019

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

I write regarding Enes Kanter, a Turkish professional basketball player being targeted by Turkey's leaders for his outspoken criticism of their increasingly autocratic rule. I urge you to make clear to your Turkish counterparts that this sort of retribution is not acceptable behavior, particularly for a U.S. ally.

Mr. Kanter is a talented basketball player who was selected third in the 2011 National Basketball Association (NBA) draft and now plays for my hometown Portland Trail Blazers. Off the court, Mr. Kanter has eloquently and powerfully exercised his freedom of conscience to criticize Turkey's President, Recep Tayyipp Erdogan. President Erdogan has responded like many thin-skinned autocrats before him, by going after Mr. Kanter and his family. The Erdogan administration revoked Mr. Kanter's passport in 2017 and accused him of associating with terrorists for his support of Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish cleric living in the United States.

This is a serious charge but given President Erdogan's history one must be extremely skeptical of the Turkish government line without seeing some substantial evidence. And thus far, President Erdogan has declined to publicize any substantial evidence. Taking a page out of Vladimir Putin's playbook, President Erdogan has instead demanded that INTERPOL, an international police organization, issue a "red notice" for Mr. Kanter.

While the United States has not cooperated with such transparent attempts to use international organizations for political ends, there is no guarantee that other countries will follow suit—which is why Mr. Kanter typically remains in the United States when his team travels abroad. And Mr. Kanter must be careful here as well; you will recall that President Erdogan ordered his security detail to assault peaceful protestors in Washington, D.C. two years ago. Reports now indicate that President Erdogan's prosecutors are seeking Mr. Kanter's extradition to Turkey, much in the same way he has sought to have Mr. Gulen extradited.

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America cannot and must not stay silent in the face of such a blatant assault on free thought and expression. This is even truer when the perpetrators of such odious behavior are supposed friends and allies. Accordingly, I call on you to raise Mr. Kanter's case, publicly and in private, and to state for the record that the U.S. will not cooperate with these "red notices" or extradition requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Wyden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Ron" and "Wyden" being capitalized and prominent.

Ron Wyden
United States Senator