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October 23, 2007

His Excellency Recep Tayyip Erdogan
Prime Minister
Republic of Turkey
c/o Ambassador Nabi Sensoy
2525 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Prime Minister Erdogan:

I write to express my deep concern over the recent conviction of two Turkish journalists, Arat Dink and Sekis Seropyan, for allegedly "insulting Turkishness" by calling the massacre of Armenians in the early 20th century a genocide. It defies reason that speaking or writing of the Armenian Genocide could ever be considered a crime. Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, under which such speech is criminalized, undermines Turkey's democratic traditions, and I urge you to repeal it.

As you know, the freedom of speech and freedom of the press are core values of democratic societies. By protecting these basic freedoms we do more than protect individual rights; we protect democracy itself. Turkey is not alone in struggling with the proper balance of rights and responsibilities; these debates occur frequently in the United States as well. It is vital for both our countries to guarantee the fundamental rights that all people deserve, and that are the foundation for our democracies.

While free speech is not an insult to Turkishness, laws which undermine basic democratic rights certainly are. It is my sincere hope that you will absolve the convictions of Arat Dink and Sekis Seropyan, and will repeal Article 301 to prevent such baseless criminal charges from being levied again.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey