

August 18, 2016

VIA E-MAIL

The Vice President  
Old Executive Office Building  
Washington, DC 20501

Dear Mr. Vice President:

We are writing to you ahead of your visit to Ankara, Turkey on August 24th to express our deep concern regarding the present conditions faced by our colleagues in the press and media in Turkey.

It has been well-documented that prior to the events of July 15th and the failed coup attempt, Turkish media has been under extreme pressure either by specific actions of the government or the unchecked behavior of those claiming to be its supporters. For many years, Turkey has had more free-expression cases filed against it in the European Court of Human Rights than any other signatory to the convention. Despite repeated attempts by international press organizations to raise concerns with the Turkish authorities and encourage a dialogue, these free press issues have been unaddressed. As a result, the situation has worsened significantly for many of our colleagues.

Following July's failed coup attempt the pattern has escalated and media has become an even bigger target for state repression. The number of independent media outlets forcibly closed by the government or its supporters has dramatically increased, while individual journalists have been singled out for heavy-handed treatment. Despite a lack of evidence outlining complicity in anti-state activities in the lead-up to, or during the July 15th events, some prominent journalists critical of the government have nonetheless been arrested and imprisoned, accused of espionage and treason with the prospect of lengthy sentences if convicted. Many more journalists, editors and media owners live in fear of reprisal. We share their fears that in the aftermath of the coup attempt the authorities are justifying their clampdown against critical opposition media under the guise of defending national security – a deplorable situation given the very real security concerns present in the region.

Mr. Vice President, press freedom in Turkey has hit its lowest point. The people of Turkey and the region require a healthy, vibrant and protected media to promote much needed transparency and accountability, and to help spread democratic values where they are at their most vulnerable.

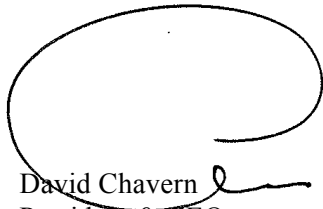
The global press looks to the United States as one of the few remaining powers willing to show determination when it comes to confronting countries, regardless of their strategic importance, with the hard truths of their failure. Therefore, we respectfully urge you to raise the issue of press freedom in your discussions with President Erdoğan and other government officials. Specifically, we ask you to seek assurances from him that the Turkish government will:

- Respect the independence of the press and the right of the Turkish media to operate free from harassment and intervention of any kind;
- Reinstate ownership to those independent media outlets whose rights have hitherto been violated or removed; and
- Exercise maximum restraint in recognition of its responsibilities and obligations to freedom of expression under the numerous international covenants to which Turkey is a signatory.

Finally, we urge you to raise with the Turkish government the cases of those journalists who have been sent to jail or who are awaiting trial simply for carrying out their professional duties, and to call for their immediate release, and above all to prioritize journalists' safety in all interactions with law enforcement and security forces.

Mr. Vice President, we look forward to your response and remain entirely at your disposition should you require further information. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

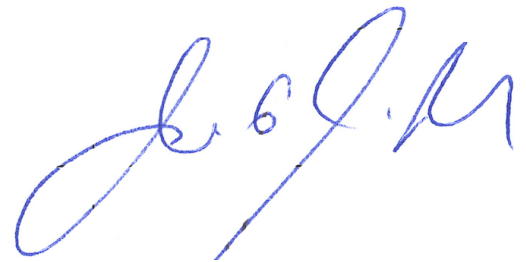
Most respectfully,



David Chavern  
President & CEO  
Newspaper Association of America



Tomas Brunegård  
President  
WAN-IFRA



Marcelo Rech  
President  
World Editors Forum

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