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TURKEY MUST RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS OF ITS KURDISH MINORITY!

**HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA**

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to spend a few minutes to talk about some developments recently in the country of Turkey, some of which we celebrate, some of which we have great concern about.

Let me first, by the way, extend my condolences to victims of yesterday's terrorist bombings in Turkey and to the families of the victims. Certainly we want the perpetrators brought to justice quickly.

But I rise to celebrate a small, but very important, victory for human rights that took place last week. Four human rights prisoners in Turkey were released. Leyla Zana, a prominent Kurdish advocate for human rights, and her colleagues, Hatip Dicle, Slim Sadak and Ornhan Dogan, were released from

prison following a June 9 appeals court ruling in their favor.

These were Kurdish citizens of Turkey. These were citizens who were elected by majority vote to the Turkish Parliament. These were Kurds who had the nerve to speak their own native language, Kurdish, in the Turkish Parliament; and they were arrested and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Amnesty International declared them prisoners of conscience. They have been there 10 years.

Leyla Zana was probably the best known of the four prisoners. She was the first Kurdish woman elected to Turkey's Parliament who openly and proudly identified herself as a Kurd. In fact, the European Parliament awarded her a

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Sakharov Prize in 1995 for defending human rights.

I had the great pleasure of getting to know her husband, Mehdi, who traveled around the world to talk about the injustice of his wife being in prison. I spent time with her son Ronay who was for a short time a student in Los Angeles. This was a whole family dedicated to human rights for all, and especially to the Kurdish minority who has been denied them in Turkey.

The release of these prisoners of conscience was a result of international pressure, and I want to thank the 21 Members of Congress who joined with me in H. Res. 302 that called for the release of these four parliamentarians. The Kurdish community in the United States, as well as human rights advocates across the country, played an important role in gaining their release.

So we welcome the release of these prisoners of conscience, as well as other reforms in Turkey, including the introduction of public broadcasting in minority languages. However, serious human rights and repression of the Kurds continue in Turkey.

From June 8-10, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the International Federation for Human Rights joined with Turkish human rights groups in a joint delegation to investigate the situation in Turkey. They heard continuing allegations of torture and violations of freedom of expression,

assembly, association, religion, and the right to a fair trial. They expressed concern about prisons, national minorities, the lack of independent investigations into human rights violations, and internal displacement.

The State Department human rights report, released just in February, also found that serious human rights problems exist. The report says that security forces killed 43 people last year and participated in widespread torture, beatings, and other abuses. The Turkish Government continued to limit free speech in the press and, in particular, restricted expression by people sympathetic to Kurdish cultural or nationalist viewpoints.

So we are pleased at the release of Leyla Zana and her colleagues, but we are not placated by this good news. We demand greater progress. The European Union should insist that Turkey take greater strides to improve its human rights record and treatment of the Kurds before joining the European Union. Turkey needs to realize that its Kurdish citizens enrich the country rather than threaten it.

President Bush will visit Turkey for a NATO summit next week. He should use this opportunity to press for greater respect for human rights. I would hope that he meets with Leyla Zana and shows his respect for human rights for the Kurdish minority in Turkey.