



U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

Religious Freedom in Turkey

Thursday, June 27, 2019
10:30 AM – 12:00 PM
216 Hart Senate Office Building

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Thank you, Chair Perkins. In recent years, we have witnessed poor human rights conditions in Turkey continue to deteriorate amid government efforts to purge political opponents and silence critics. The human rights situation has suffered in part due to the unchecked use of hate speech intended to further polarize an already divided society. State officials and politicians have repeatedly engaged in hate speech and anti-Semitism targeting Turkey's Christian and Jewish communities, and have used accusations of minority ethnic or religious background as a slur to discredit political opponents. Most recently, as Istanbul prepared to repeat controversial mayoral elections, ranking officials in Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party accused the main opposition candidate and newly elected mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, of "secretly" being Greek.

Even more disturbing have been recent manifestations of violence against members of the Greek and Armenian communities in Turkey. This past May, a Greek man was found murdered in his home with his hands and feet bound. That same month, an Armenian woman was attacked and stabbed multiple times at the door of her Istanbul home, with her assailants telling her "this is just the beginning." Two months before, her home had been vandalized with profanity and hate speech. Incidents such as these have given way to a rise in fear among these communities, and some have blamed the rhetoric of the government for the surge in hate crimes.

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Vice Chair Gayle Manchin Remarks, Religious Freedom in Turkey