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Mr. Guido Westerwelle
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Auswärtiges Amt
Berlin 11013
Germany

Paris, Berlin, Varna, 16 November 2011

Subject: Your visit to Turkmenistan

Dear Foreign Minister Westerwelle,

In view of your visit to Turkmenistan, Reporters Without Borders and the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights would like to draw your attention to the situation of freedom of information and human rights defenders in this country.

Turkmenistan has been ranked near the bottom of the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index for years. The hopes of democratization that were raised by President Saparmurat Niyazov's death have come to nothing. His successor, Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, has launched his own personality cult, the state continues to control all the media, and the use of torture and the confinement of dissidents to psychiatric hospitals are as widespread as ever. Although aged 80, Amangelen Shapudakov was forced to spend 40 days in a psychiatric institution this past spring just for providing information to *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*.

The circulation of independently reported news and information is extremely limited and comes almost entirely from outlets based abroad. Independent journalists and bloggers are forced to operate clandestinely. A number of Internet users were questioned by the security services for breaking the official silence surrounding a deadly explosion at an arms depot in the Ashgabat suburb of Abadan in July and, according to several international media, some are still being held.

To our knowledge, at least two journalists are currently detained in connection with work: Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadjiyev. They are serving jail sentences of six and seven years respectively for helping to make a documentary about Turkmenistan in 2006 for "Envoyé spécial," a current affairs programme broadcast by the French state-owned TV station *France 2*, and for gathering information about the human rights situation for the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation. A third journalist who was convicted at the same time, Ogulsapar Muradova, died in detention in September 2006 after being tortured.

Another journalist recently fell victim to Turkmenistan's biased and unpredictable judicial system. Dovletmyrat Yazkulyyev, a reporter for the Turkmen-language service of *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, was sentenced to five years in prison on 5 October after a summary trial held behind closed doors. The pardon he received three weeks later suggests that international pressure sometimes produces results.

We urge you to do everything in your power to obtain the release of Mr. Amanklychev and Mr. Khadjiyev. Attention is paid to what Germany says in the region, both by the authorities and the population. As the representative of a leading European nation, you have a duty to encourage this strategic partner to open up and move towards democracy. We are convinced that, by showing you do not avoid sensitive subjects, you would reinforce your credibility for all negotiations in the eyes of your interlocutors.

We trust you will give this matter your careful consideration.

Sincerely,

Jean-François Julliard
Reporters Without Borders
Secretary-general



Tadjigul Begmedova
Turkmenistan Helsinki
Foundation for Human
Rights Chairman



Michael Rediske
Reporter ohne Grenzen
Board chairman

