June 30, 2016

His Excellency Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow

President of the Republic of Turkmenistan

c/o H.E. Meret Orazov, Ambassador

Embassy of the Republic of Turkmenistan in the U.S.

2207 Massachusetts Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20008

Dear President Berdimuhamedow:

July 7, 2016 marks one year since Saparmamed Nepeskuliev, a freelance journalist who contributed to RFE/RL’s Turkmen Service and Alternative Turkmenistan News, has been in custody. For much of that time he has been in incommunicado detention. We the undersigned, are writing to call for an end to his wrongful imprisonment and urge his prompt release.

Prior to his disappearance, Mr. Nepeskuliev reported on economic development, infrastructure, social services, and education in Turkmenistan’s western regions with the aim of informing citizens about challenges facing their communities and of helping them to improve their lives. He went missing in Avaza on July 7, 2015 and, after three weeks, on July 28, his family learned that he was being detained in a prison in Akdash. On August 31, 2015, in closed proceedings, Mr. Nepeskuliev was convicted on fabricated charges of narcotics possession and sentenced to three years in prison by a Turkmenbashi city court.

In light of concerns expressed by the UN Human Rights Committee about conditions in detention in Turkmenistan and the risk of ill-treatment including torture (See the Human Rights Committee, CCPR/C/TKM/CO/1, para. 9), we fear for Mr. Nepeskuliev’s health and safety. We have not been able to obtain any information about Mr. Nepeskuliev’s welfare since September 2015. Our concern for Mr. Nepeskuliev is intensified by our recollection of the fate of Ogulsapar Muradova, an RFE/RL contributor who died in a Turkmen prison under suspicious circumstances in September 2006.

Mr. Nepeskuliev’s case has been reviewed by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which in December 2015 designated his detention “arbitrary” because he “has been held incommunicado with no access to a legal representative; he was deprived of his right to legal assistance of his own choosing” and he “has been deprived of liberty for having peacefully exercised his right to freedom of expression as guaranteed by article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.” The Working Group called for his release and that he be compensated.

Numerous rights groups and NGOs have protested Mr. Nepeskuliev’s detention, and called on EU officials to raise his case during the recent EU-Turkmenistan Human Rights Dialogue in May.

As representatives of our respective organizations and leaders of the international NGO community, Mr. President, we are committed to promoting and protecting the same international conventions and standards guaranteeing international law and human rights that Turkmenistan has pledged to uphold. Mr. Nepeskuliev’s conviction on trumped-up charges and his incommunicado detention are violations of his rights as guaranteed by Turkmenistan’s constitution and its commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Turkmenistan is a party. We call for his immediate release.

Sincerely,

Thomas Burr, President, National Press Club

Ivar Dale, Senior Adviser, Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Matthew Fischer-Daly, Coordinator, Cotton Campaign

Judy Gearhart, Executive Director, International Labor Rights Forum

Delphine Halgand, U.S. Director, Reporters Without Borders

Robert Herman, PhD, Vice President for International Programs, Freedom House

Ryota Jonen, Director, World Movement for Democracy

Thomas Kent, President, RFE/RL, Inc.

Denis Krivosheev, Deputy Director (Research), Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Amnesty International

Ruslan Myatiev, Editor, *Alternative Turkmenistan News*

Nina Ognianova, Europe and Central Asia Program Coordinator, Committee to Protect Journalists

Kate Watters, Executive Director, Crude Accountability

Hugh Williamson, Director, Europe and Central Asia Division, Human Rights Watch

cc: The Honorable Rashid Meredov, Foreign Minister, Republic of Turkmenistan

The Honorable John Kerry, U.S. Secretary of State

The Honorable Adam Schiff, Chairman, Congressional Caucus on Freedom of the Press

The Honorable Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Chairperson, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

The Honorable Sètondji Adjovi, Chair-Rapporteur, UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention