

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 29, 2019

His Excellency Kassym-Jomart Tokayev
President of the Republic of Kazakhstan
Ak Orda Presidential Palace
Left Bank
Nur-Sultan 020000, Kazakhstan

Dear President Tokayev:

We are writing to convey our concerns about the continued detention of businessman Iskander Yerimbetov. We are particularly troubled by the arbitrary nature of his detention and reports that he has been subjected to physical and psychological torture while in custody, and urge the release of Mr. Yerimbetov and dismissal of the charges against him.

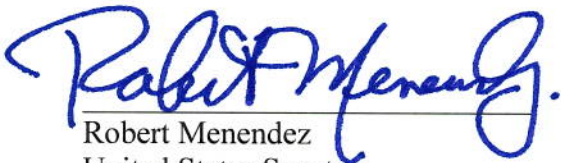
Mr. Yerimbetov, a businessman and the founder of three different companies, was arrested without a warrant in November 2017 on charges of money laundering. Neither he nor his lawyer was informed of the charges until his pretrial detention hearing. After several extensions of his pretrial detention, investigators issued new charges in March 2018 accusing him of fraud. In October 2018, Mr. Yerimbetov was convicted of fraud and sentenced to seven years in prison. However, on numerous occasions Mr. Yerimbetov's interrogators allegedly told him that the charges would "go away" if he persuaded his sister, lawyer Botagoz Jardemalie, who has been granted political asylum in Belgium, to return to Kazakhstan and testify against Mukhtar Ablyazov, a political opponent of the Kazakh government. The November 2017 charges against Mr. Yerimbetov accused him of belonging to an "organized criminal group" directed by Mr. Ablyazov even though Mr. Yerimbetov has stated that he has no connections with Mr. Ablyazov. Based on information we have received, the charges against Mr. Yerimbetov are fabricated and politically motivated, and appear to be part of a broader campaign by the Kazakh government against Ablyazov.

Reputable human rights and multilateral organizations including Human Rights Watch, the Coalition Against Torture in Kazakhstan, the Open Dialog Foundation, the Council of Europe, and the United Nations have raised serious concerns about the charges against Mr. Yerimbetov and his treatment in detention. The State Department's 2018 Human Rights Report on Kazakhstan mentions him as one of 24 individuals imprisoned on politically motivated charges. In November 2018 the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that "the detention of Mr. Yerimbetov constitutes an arbitrary deprivation of his liberty" because "authorities lack a legal basis for his continued detention" and he was "denied [his] due process rights under international treaties...and under various provisions of domestic law." They called for his immediate release and compensation, as well as an investigation of the circumstances around his detention and appropriate measures against those responsible for violating his rights.

Despite widespread calls for his release and the UN Working Group's unequivocal decision, Mr. Yerimbetov remains in detention with limited access to his family and lawyers. Mr. Yerimbetov has reportedly been subjected to torture and inhuman treatment while in detention, and we are deeply concerned about his wellbeing. We urge you to immediately release Mr. Yerimbetov and dismiss the charges against him. We further call on you to investigate the torture claims and take appropriate measures against anyone involved in torturing him.

Thank you for your attention to these issues.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Cory Gardner
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Mike Braun
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



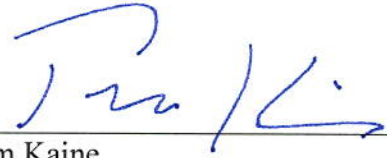
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



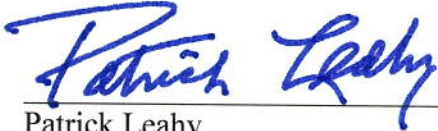
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



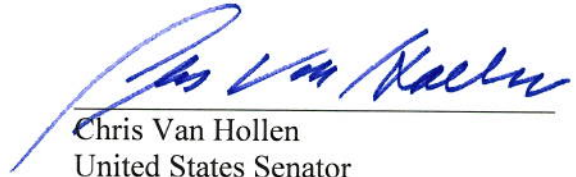
Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator