

***Murat Yasa Written Testimony
in front of the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats***

May 25, 2017

Introduction:

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Engel, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify today about the brutal attack on peaceful protestors, including myself, by Turkish security forces outside the Turkish Ambassador's Residence on May 16, 2017.

I fled Turkey in the early 80's and came to the United States to pursue a better life. Indeed it was hard to leave my family behind, but it was worth for me because I firmly believed in the fundamental American values.

I am a proud father of U.S. born children. My biggest accomplishment has been to provide my children the freedom and security that I was deprived of as a child in Turkey. So imagine my disappointment and heartbreak when Erdogan and Turkish bodyguards violently attacked me for exercising my right to freedom of assembly on American soil.

As somebody that takes pride in the fundamental American values, it was hard for me to explain to my children why I was attacked, and why Erdogan's goons were able to escape the U.S. without any justice.

To ensure justice is served is not for my benefit. It is for our children and the unpredictable future that lays ahead. To hold the perpetrators accountable for their unjustifiable and brutal attacks is not for my benefit. It is to reflect the values that is engraved in the hearts of all Americans.

For the past 30 years, I have attended countless protests, because it is my right as an American citizen to do so. On Tuesday, May 16, 2017, I woke up early and made my way into DC. I was there to protest against Erdogan as he visited the White House. I was there to protest against his direct attack on Kurds in Turkey. I was there to protest against the unlawful imprisonment of Kurdish opposition. I was there to exercise my 1st amendment right. I was there as an American citizen.

Thereafter, a small number of us decided to continue our protest in front of the Turkish Ambassador's residence. We arrived there at approximately 2:45 p.m. There was 15 of us on the sidewalk across the Ambassador's residence. Among us were women, and children under the age of 7. Just briefly after arriving, we began our protest and condemned Erdogan for his direct attack on Kurds and Kurdish children. One of our slogan was dedicated to Mr. Selahattin Demirtas, who is the co-chair of the pro-Kurdish political opposition in Turkey. Mr. Demirtas has been unlawfully arrested and still waiting trial while in jail since November 2016.



Figure 1 Our group on May 16, 2017, across the Turkish Ambassador's Residence

Our posters were pictures of Mr. Demirtas. Our slogans were “freedom for Demirtas.” Meanwhile, the pro-Erdogan supporters, gathered across from us, across the street, were using insulting and vulgar words directed at us, and the children. After a verbal altercation, the pro-Erdogan supporters crossed the sidewalk, and made their way into the street, ready to attack us. The DC police were able to intervene before the conflict escalated, and attempted to get them back on the sidewalk.

Thereafter, the police remained in front of the Turkish protestors, and tried to prevent them from attacking us. But after a few minutes, Erdogan’s bodyguards, dressed in black suits and ties, pushed their way through the DC police, and attacked our group. Erdogan’s bodyguards were joined by the Turkish security personnel, as well as his supporters. There was more than 50 of them, some armed, but all were ready to attack. They came at us in such force, that even the DC police was unable to prevent them from charging at us. Although they tried, the DC police remained outnumbered and unable to protect any of us from the brutal attacks.

At any given time, there was at least five to six men over each one of the protestors. They repeatedly kicked us, threw punches, and left us with bloody heads and severe injuries.

As soon as I saw the men running towards our group, I turned around and saw one of the woman protestors, Lucy Osoyan, who is sitting next to me today. She was grabbed by two of the bodyguards, and being punched. I ran over to help her, but was kicked to the floor myself. Thereafter, more than 4 men brutally and repeatedly kicked me, as I laid on the cement floor. As I attempted to get up, I was kicked back to the ground each time. I remember closing my eyes, and all I could think about were my children.

I truly thought that I was going to die. I felt so helpless as I laid on the ground. And every time I thought that they were done attacking me, I would feel another kick to my face.

It was very hard for me to grasp what had just happened. It felt like a bad dream, but the pain was very real.

Thereafter, the kicks and punches finally came to a stop, and I was able to get myself up with the help of two DC police officers. My shirt was covered in blood, and my vision was blurry. I was in complete shock, and unable to observe what was going on around me. The DC police helped me sit on the grass, across from the place I was attacked. And as I sat there, I still could not believe the incident that unfolded just moments earlier.

The first ambulance to arrive, brought first-aid kits, and attempted to treat us at the scene. However, seven of us, including three women protestors, were later rushed to the emergency room at George Washington Hospital. Another woman protestor was sent to the Georgetown Hospital Emergency Room.

I was rushed into the ER upon arrival. My injuries included, a large cut on my nose that required stitches; bruised and swollen lip; one of my tooth was broken and three others became loose; and I had scratches across my face and my head. I was at the ER until 10:00 pm, and was sent home with pain medication. The doctors at the ER informed me that my swollen lip prevented them from accessing my teeth, and referred me to a specialist. I was also told to make an appointment with my primary physician, and follow-up about my severe injuries.

I was physically in pain, and emotionally drained. I could not comprehend what happened, and could not find the words to describe any of this to my family.

I arrived home late, and my wife and kids were waiting by the door. They greeted me with hugs, as they tried to fight back their tears. We went inside our home, and sat in our family room, with high emotions all around the room. I could not hide the tears from my wife or children. To see them again was what I kept envisioning as I was brutally beaten by the Turkish security forces. As I laid there bleeding, I did not think that I would get this opportunity, and so I held them a little tighter that night, and hugged them until they fell asleep.

It has been a little over a week since this brutal and violence incident. And I still cannot find a way to explain this to my children. How does a foreign government come to the United States and deprive us, American citizens, of the rights that the Constitution grants us? How could a brutal attack, such as this, happen on American soil? How can I explain to my children that the country we love, and the country we call home, is the place where I was stripped off my rights?

To let the aggressors and the perpetrators get away with the crimes committed against women, children, and myself, on American soil, is to set a dangerous precedent, with dangerous consequences.

I want to emphasize my gratitude to all of you here today. Thank you for your commitment to the fundamental American values, and our Constitution. Thank you for ensuring that justice is served, and that what Erdogan does to Kurds in Turkey, he cannot do to us in America.

In the following page, I have included few pictures of members of our group after the attack.



Me after being attacked by Turkish security forces



Woman protestor being head-locked by Turkish bodyguards



Protestor that was repeatedly kicked by Turkish bodyguards