

To whom it may concern,
Address:
Date

Erdogan's illegal global purge against Gulen-affiliated schools across the world and transfer of Afghan-Turk schools to Maarif Foundation in Herat, Afghanistan on November 11th, 2018.

After pressure from Turkey's government, Afghan authorities forced director changes in two schools previously affiliated with Gulen Movement in Herat, to the dismay of unhappy families who, for much of this year, opposed and resisted against any takeover of schools by an Ankara-backed organization.

Turkey's global purge against Gulen-affiliated schools across the world and transfer of those schools to Maarif Foundation, which had been specifically entrusted with regulating and coordinating schools funded by Turkish people abroad, is not simply a matter of domestic policy or a consequence of a clash between two different political actors within Turkey. Ankara's never-ending purge and seizures, which now reached to 21 countries as Presidential Spokesman Ibrahim Kalin boasted, have international dimensions as well. The changes also have implications for the host country where the management change is bound to stir up a set of unwanted consequences both in terms of education quality and ideology that the new administration espouses.

It is well known that Gulen-inspired businessmen and teachers voluntarily found hundreds of schools in more than 170 countries across the world. During the span of past two decades, these schools have proved themselves as established institutions and displayed a feat of success in their modern, advanced education. These schools promote inter-cultural interaction, enhance and broaden the vision of local students, be it northern Iraq or a remote, impoverished country in Africa, and inspire them to become successful people, contributing to their respective countries. These schools proved themselves in international and national science competitions and displayed an unflinching commitment to the most advanced techniques of education in any field. This point is evidently manifested by how most countries treated and welcomed those schools before the Turkish government's zealous and ever-persistent demands to take over them to crush Gulen Movement. Ankara's export of its domestic crackdown on the community to global level has had repercussions for its ties with countries which host Gulen-affiliated schools. While the Western countries outright rejected Ankara's demands, many countries struggled to maintain a delicate balance between honoring international norms to let those schools operate uninterrupted and subduing to the bullying of the Turkish authorities. The latter mostly happened

in Ukraine, Moldova, Kosovo, Pakistan, Gabon, Somalia and many other countries. Another point warrants further attention. Maarif Foundation's institutional philosophy and functional structure are unmistakably infused by the Erdogan government's political ideology and agenda, therefore is exposed to the influence of politicization. The previously secular and ideology-blind education mindset that suffused Gulen-affiliated schools is replaced by an institution, which serves as the ideological pillar of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government. This point is certainly bound to diminish the quality of education that new generations of students receive in Maarif-run schools.

The international community cannot simply turn a blind eye on Ankara's global school takeovers by regarding the matter simply as a domestic clash. As international reports efficiently document how education and basic human rights take setbacks in the developing world in recent years, a political war on NGOs specialized in education, a set of takeover of schools from private foundations will certainly have a negative impact on the global fight to reduce the number of children without an access to education.

Afghanistan has long suffered wars, civil strifes and poverty. Many school-age children are unable to attend schools and even some of them are deterred by extremists from going to schools. In this unfavorable environment, it is imperative for the international community to stand up for the people's unquestionable right to education. It is already long overdue for the international community to register their disapproval and voice their criticism against Ankara's attempts to seize schools previously (and very effectively) ran by civil society organizations around the world. Regardless of nature and root causes of Erdogan's political vendetta against the Gulen community across the globe, it is a must for the world to stand by Afghan people in their struggle to protect their schools from the political intervention of any form.

And today's takeover in Herat, Afghanistan, only highlighted the urgency of that need and imperative to hear the voice of families of Afghan students. We must remind them that they are not alone. They have a right to education in the way they freely choose, as anyone else in the rest of the world. We stand by them in this struggle.

Yours Sincerely

Signature

Name & Title

