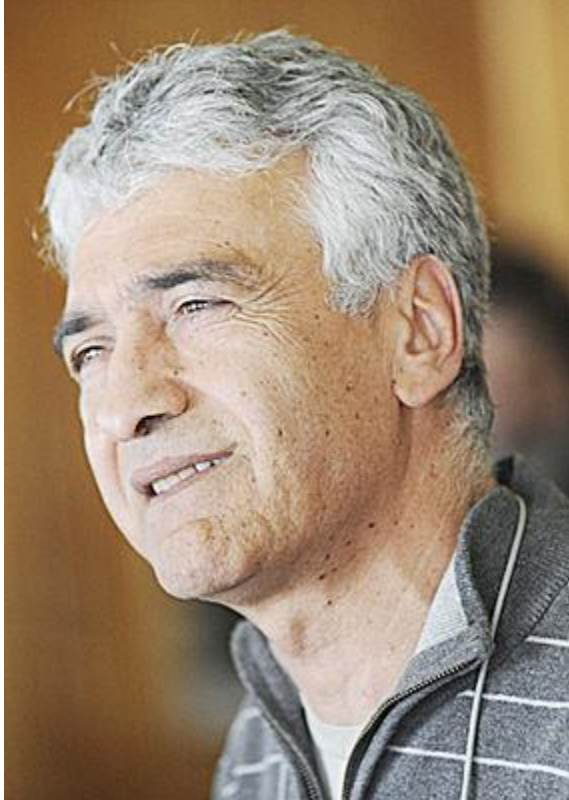


# Upton gets letter from Turkish Consulate



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By TONY WITTKOWSKI - HP Staff Writer |

HARBERT — Word has traveled fast that Ibrahim Parlak is again seeking protection for asylum under the threat of torture.

U.S. Rep. Fred Upton received a letter by fax Friday and another by mail over the weekend from the Turkish Consulate claiming Parlak is a fugitive who fled to the U.S. after escaping prison.

While Upton, R-St. Joseph, is working with the State Department to confirm the letter's authenticity, he said he is still in support of the Harbert restaurateur.

“This troubling letter underscores a real threat to Ibrahim, and only reinforces the fact that we need to continue our bipartisan work to keep Ibrahim in Southwest Michigan,” Upton told The Herald-Palladium in an email Tuesday. “His future is in jeopardy and we need an all-hands-on-deck effort to stop his unjust deportation.”

If genuine, the letter might help Parlak from a legal standpoint.

Parlak and various legislators are pushing for the Immigration Review Board to reopen Parlak's case as he seeks relief under the Convention Against Torture – an international law that protects refugees from being returned under threat of torture or death.

Robert Carpenter, Parlak's attorney, said the letter to Upton from the Turkish government confirms what they feared was occurring across seas.

“Prior to them sending it, we didn't have anything from the Turkish government saying they wanted him back,” Carpenter said. “Now it closes the gap. There is no doubt they want him back. Calling him an escaped prisoner is a bold-faced lie. We have documentation from Turkey proving he was released.

“It certainly helped our case because it solidified the notion that Ibrahim will be tortured.”

Parlak's letters

The letter Upton received through fax and mail came from Umut Acar – a consul general for Turkey.

Acar wrote that Parlak deliberately misled U.S. authorities about his criminal background and his membership with the PKK. The letter went on to detail alleged events about Parlak's involvement with the PKK.

According to Acar's letter, the PKK appointed Parlak to a terror mission from Syria to Turkey in March 1988. Acar alleged that Parlak's unit spotted two Turkish Border Patrol officers and killed them before escaping to Syria.

According to the letter, Parlak was sentenced to life in prison with his sentence later reduced to six years as part of the Turkish Republic Reintegration Act. Acar wrote that Parlak had confessed to the crime and served as a government witness in the conviction of other PKK terrorists in Turkey.

Parlak then allegedly escaped from prison after serving 16 months before illegally entering the U.S. as a fugitive.

“The facts of Parlak's crime are gruesome and alarming, particularly given that he has managed to evade the U.S. authorities, open and operate a restaurant in Michigan, and lead a secret life for so long,” Acar said in the letter. “What is basically a deportation and extradition of national security proportions has regrettably become the object of misguided ethnic politics that dangerously and prejudicially equate Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin with the PKK terrorist organization.”

Parlak has denied these claims along with a response letter from his attorney, who sent a copy to Upton.

Carpenter wrote in the response letter that the Turkish Consulate's accusation of Parlak hiding in America is unfounded. Carpenter refuted this stance by saying he's been nothing but open about his past while also running a business in plain sight.

#### Unwavering support

Martin Dzuris, a New Buffalo resident and longtime Parlak supporter, said the letter comes as a surprise to Parlak and his regulars at Cafe Gulistan.

Dzuris said the letter has the same language as some of the threats made against Parlak's life that he has previously received through email.

It's a concern to Parlak, as Dzuris said the Turkish native is worried about his safety in the U.S. Dzuris claimed the Turkish government's actions and "escalating hostility" might inspire some Turkish group or individual to take action against Parlak.

"It shows what lengths they are willing to go," Dzuris said. "A lot of these groups take matters into their own hands. We are now concerned for his safety here. There are independent international groups that target what are perceived to be enemies of the state. The Consulate is making him a target."

The letter from the Turkish Consulate comes two weeks after U.S. Senators Gary Peters and Debbie Stabenow, both of Michigan, submitted letters to Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson in support of reopening Parlak's case.

In both letters, the two Senate members asked for Department of Homeland Security and Immigration Customs and Enforcement officials for Parlak's plea for asylum to be heard with new evidence of the rising threats to the Kurdish people in Turkey.

In January, Upton and U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Illinois, also sent a two-page letter to DHS and ICE officials in support of the motion to reopen Parlak's case.

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