October 25, 2013

G. Lincoln McCurdy
President
Turkish Coalition of America
1510 H Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. McCurdy,

I want to convey my congratulations and best wishes to the Turkish people and the Turkish-American community on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Turkish Republic.

The growing connections between the African American community and the Turkish people are best exemplified by our shared, unique connections through the arts. This year in the U.S. House of Representatives, Congressman John Conyers introduced H.Res.179 recognizing International Jazz Day, which pays tribute to Ahmet Ertegun, the Turkish American founder of Atlantic Records, and his brother Nesuhi. Sons of Turkey’s second ambassador to the United States, Ahmet and Nesuhi organized the first ever racially integrated jazz concerts at the Turkish Embassy when Washington, D.C. was still segregated. The resolution recognizes “the historic connection between Turkey and jazz music through the contributions of the Ertegun brothers.”

The choice of Istanbul as the host city of the 2013 International Jazz Day was fitting given this historic bond—a bond which generated the interest of prominent African Americans towards Turkey.

In 1953, Eartha Kitt recorded “Uskudara Gideriken” which was based on a Turkish folk song and later became one of her first hits. James Baldwin is also known for his deep affinity for Turkey. Baldwin first visited Istanbul in 1961 and returned to the city many times during the next ten years, making it a second home. It was here where he finished his book “Another Country.” Pages of his most celebrated work, “The Fire Next Time,” were written in Istanbul.

The bonds between African American and Turkish peoples continue to be celebrated by both communities. In particular, the efforts to further promote and foster this relationship spearheaded by the Turkish Coalition of America (TCA) have made a significant impact. Through the Study Abroad in Turkey scholarship program more than 170 African American students have been given the opportunity to study abroad in Turkey, bringing these two peoples and cultures even closer together.
Again, I extend my greatest appreciation to the Turkish people for advancing the relationship between Turkey and the African American community.

Congratulations on the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Turkish Republic.

Respectfully,

Andre Carson
Member of Congress