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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

September 11, 2023

The Honorable Anthony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

CC: Christopher L. Eisgruber
President, Princeton University
Office of the President
1 Nassau Hall
Princeton, NJ 08544

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to express our grave concern regarding the safety and well-being of Elizabeth Tsurkov, an Israeli-Russian dual citizen and PhD candidate at Princeton University, who was abducted by Kataeb Hezbollah, an Iran-backed militia, in March while conducting research for her dissertation. We urge the Administration to raise Elizabeth's abduction with the Iraqi government in order to secure her release.

As a citizen of both Israel and Russia, but not of the United States, Elizabeth is in a uniquely vulnerable position. Because Iraq does not recognize the State of Israel, Israeli officials, while sharing our grave concern, are constrained in their ability to advocate for Elizabeth's safe return. Russia, on the other hand, has done nothing to advocate on Elizabeth's behalf due to her principled and vocal opposition to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. As the United States Senators representing New Jersey, where Elizabeth has spent much of her recent time in the United States as a Princeton doctoral candidate, we believe the United States can and should play a role in advocating for her since her home countries are unable or unwilling to do so.

Elizabeth is highly regarded as both a keen analyst and a compassionate observer of Middle East policy. She has briefed both our staffs. We are particularly concerned by an organized online disinformation campaign that attempts to portray Elizabeth as a spy. The facts are simple: Elizabeth was in Iraq to conduct research for her Princeton dissertation when she was abducted by Kataeb Hezbollah simply because she is Jewish and Israeli. Suggestions to the contrary are not only patently false, they are dangerous.

We therefore urge the Administration to use our close and abiding relationship with Iraq to raise Elizabeth's abduction and call for her release at every opportunity and level. Because we believe that time is of the essence in securing Elizabeth's quick release and safe return, we also request

that the State Department provide our staffs with a classified briefing within 30 days on Elizabeth's whereabouts, health, and well-being, as well as efforts taken or planned by the U.S. government to advocate for her release.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
Chairman



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator