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Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
February 8, 2018

The below is attributable to Spokesperson Heather Nauert:

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson met with Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales today. The Secretary and the President exchanged views on progress in countering narcotics trafficking through Guatemalan territories. The Secretary reiterated U.S. support for anti-corruption efforts and urged President Morales to keep up the fight against corruption, which undermines security, prosperity, and governance in Guatemala. The Secretary also acknowledged Guatemala's alignment with U.S. positions at the United Nations.

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Heather Nauert
Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC

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TRANSCRIPT:

2:44 p.m. EST

MS NAUERT: Hi, everybody. How are you? I think this is the busiest briefing room I've seen since maybe the Secretary was here or day one on the job. So it's nice to see you all today. A couple things I want to start with. Oh, and by the way, we have some students in the back. That's why. You're all from?

PARTICIPANT: Miami University of Ohio.

MS NAUERT: Miami of Ohio. Got it. You're journalism students?

PARTICIPANT: Some.

MS NAUERT: Some of you are. Okay. Well, welcome. We're thrilled to have you here, and you should talk to some of these folks before you head out of the room. Thanks so much for coming; thanks for the time.

I'd like to start out with some news that has come out of Greece today, and I'd like to say that we want to condemn the release of a convicted terrorist. His name is Dimitris Koufodinas. He was released on a two-day furlough from a Greek prison. He is a convicted terrorist. He is responsible for killing 11 civilians – some British, U.S., and also Turkish embassy staff who had worked for the United States, and obviously the UK and Turkey. They released him on a two-day furlough. They did that just three months ago as well. We fundamentally believe that convicted terrorists do not deserve a vacation from prison. Our embassy in Athens has conveyed our serious concerns about the decision to the Greek Government.

Next, I'd like to mention something taking place in Uzbekistan. The United States Government welcomes the release of a journalist and activist named Dilmurod Saidov. He was sentenced in 2009 for 12 years for bribery and other criminal charges, but he has always maintained his innocence. We recognize the president of Uzbekistan for releasing dozens of prisoners of conscience since assuming the presidency in September of 2016 and for taking important steps to reform the rule of law in Uzbekistan. Support for the rule of law remains a core element of U.S. foreign policy and a cornerstone of any democracy. I'd also like to mention that our Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia Alice Wells traveled to Uzbekistan last week. She met with senior government officials to review progress that was made under the president's reform agenda, including on issues of human rights, fundamental freedoms, as well as security and economic cooperation, and this too was one of the matters that they discussed.

Next, in Turkey, where we'd like to say the United States is deeply concerned by the February 8th conviction without credible evidence of U.S. citizen Serkan Golge for being a member of a terror organization. We will continue to follow his case closely along with those of other U.S. citizens whose ongoing prosecution under the state of emergency raises serious concerns about respect for judicial independence, protections enshrined in the Turkish constitution, including an individual's right to a fair trial. The safety of U.S. citizens traveling to or residing in Turkey remains a concern. He was arrested, by the way, back in July of 2017. He's a NASA scientist, if that helps you to remember his case. We'd like to call on the Turkish Government to end the protracted state of emergency, to release those detained arbitrarily under emergency authorities, and to safeguard the rule of law consistent with Turkey's own domestic and international obligations

and commitments.