



CANADIAN HELLENIC CONGRESS
ΕΛΛΗΝΟΚΑΝΑΔΙΚΟ ΚΟΓΚΡΕΣΟ
CONGRÈS HELLÉNIQUE CANADIEN

1220, rue de Beauharnois, Suite 109, Montréal (QC) H4N 1J5 - hcsecret@gmail.com

July 21, 2017

Via electronic mail:
OttawaECONEXTERNAL@State.gov

The Honourable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States of America
c/o The Embassy of the United States of America
P.O. Box 866, Station B
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5T1

Subject: The Hagia Sophia in Constantinople

Dear Mr. President,

We are writing to you to express our deep concerns about Turkey's "creeping conversion" of Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

This process of mosque conversion started on June 5, 2016, when the Erdogan government permitted Muslim prayers to be read in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople – originally an Orthodox Basilica. On June 20 of this year, Koran readings and Muslim prayers were held with Turkish government officials in attendance.

The Turkish government's policy of converting the Great Church into a mosque is a hostile act and insults all Christians throughout the world. Moreover, it is a blatant violation of Hagia Sophia's UNESCO World Heritage Site Status.

Hagia Sophia was the jewel of Orthodox Christianity and predates Saint Peter's Cathedral in Rome by a thousand years. It has unique architectural features and iconography. Admired by scholars, historians and art experts, the Church reflects and embodies the inspiration of the Gospel and the deeply spiritual theology of the Greek fathers of Eastern Orthodoxy.

For over 900 years it was Christianity's greatest Church and the seat of Eastern Orthodoxy. In 1453, with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, the Great Church and symbol of Orthodoxy was desecrated and converted into a mosque. The Church's magnificent iconography was plastered over by the Ottomans in order to permit Muslim worship.

In 1935, by decision of the then Turkish regime, Hagia Sophia was turned into a museum and has remained as such until the June 5th 2016 decision of the Turkish government.

Turkey has a history of ignoring and not complying with its international obligations.

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The Canadian Hellenic Congress is a national democratic communal institution that represents, advances, advocates and promotes the interests and concerns of Canadians of Hellenic descent and Hellenism in general. The Congress is the national voice of Hellenes and their communities and/or organizations across Canada.



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We applaud your Administration's swift reaction of condemnation against the Turkish action. However, we need to do more. We urge your Administration to:

- (a) demand that Turkey, as a member of UNESCO, comply with its obligations;
- (b) request that UNESCO take remedial action to protect and safeguard the site from further desecration; and,
- (c) propose to the UN that a special status be created for the Hagia Sophia site, for the purpose of saving and preventing future desecration of the Church and permanently ensuring that Hagia Sophia, as a site of extraordinary historical significance, is shared by all faiths and peoples.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Dr. Theodore Halatsis
President

Costas Pappas
Vice-President, Administration & Secretary

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