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July 21, 2020

**Via electronic mail:**  
**[Francois-Philippe.Champagne@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Francois-Philippe.Champagne@parl.gc.ca)**

The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

**Subject: Turkey's defiant decision, in contravention of international law, to convert the Great Church of Hagia Sophia into a mosque**

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Dear Minister Champagne,

As you are aware, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan formally converted Hagia Sophia back into a mosque last week, declaring it open for Muslim worship merely hours after Turkey's high court annulled the secular Turkish government's 1934 decision making it a museum.

The Canadian Hellenic Congress (CHC) previously communicated with you on this matter on June 16<sup>th</sup> (copy attached), in a letter addressed to the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau. We have also written to other world leaders urging them to condemn the Erdogan government's defiance of international law and to demand that Turkey, as a member of UNESCO, comply with its obligations.

Given Hagia Sophia's UNESCO World Heritage Site status, UNESCO has publicly stated that it deeply regrets the Turkish authorities' decision to change the status of Hagia Sophia without prior discussion. In fact, UNESCO has called upon the Turkish authorities to initiate dialogue without delay, in order to prevent any detrimental effect on the universal value of the exceptional heritage of Hagia Sophia (copy of UNESCO's Statement also attached) and to preserve the priceless mosaic iconography on the interior of the Great Church hidden for five centuries and revealed only after decades of restoration work. The European Union, of which Turkey is a member, also condemned Turkey's action against this ancient symbol of Christianity. The US, Greece, Russia, Orthodox Churches, the World Council of Churches and Pope Francis have added their voices. It is also concerning that the Turkish Presidency website quotes President Erdogan as stating "the resurrection of Hagia Sophia heralds the liberation of the Al Aqsa Mosque" located on Temple Mount, the holiest site of Judaism in the heart of Jerusalem. In essence, this statement makes it clear that the conversion of Hagia Sophia is linked to Turkey's wider agenda which will impact Judaism and Israel too. This is clearly a matter of international concern.

Dear Mr. Minister, Canada is a founding member of UNESCO and – in view of this – the CHC, the Armenian National Committee of Canada (ANCC), and the Serbian National Shield Society of Canada (SNSS) representing the Greek, Armenian and Serbian communities respectively, stand united in urging you, as well as our Prime Minister and our Canadian government, to condemn Turkey's actions and make a public declaration in support of UNESCO's statement on this matter and make every diplomatic effort to revert Turkey's decision and safeguard universal heritage sites.

We trust you will give this matter your immediate attention by taking action to clearly state that the Turkish government's decision is not acceptable to the Canadian government and it should be reversed.

Sincerely,

**Dr. Theodore Halatsis**

CHC President

**Hrag Tarakdjian**  
**Shahen Mirakian**

ANCC Co-Presidents

**Aleksandar Pantelic**

SNSS President

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