



CANADIAN HELLENIC CONGRESS
ΕΛΛΗΝΟΚΑΝΑΔΙΚΟ ΚΟΓΚΡΕΣΟ
CONGRÈS HELLÉNIQUE CANADIEN

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August 3, 2020

Via electronic mail: sebastien.goupil@ccunesco.ca

Sébastien Goupil
Secretary General
Canadian Commission for UNESCO
Canada Council for the Arts
150 Elgin St, 2nd floor
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1L4

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

Dear Mr. Goupil,

As you are aware, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan formally converted Hagia Sophia back into a mosque earlier last month, 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. In fact, Muslim prayers were held in Hagia Sophia on July 24th.

On behalf of the Canadian Hellenic Congress (CHC), we are writing to you to express our deep concerns about Turkey's decision. We have written to Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau on this matter, as well as, 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. We have also communicated our concerns to Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO Director General and the Right Honourable Andrej Plenkovic, EU Council President. Most recently, we have sent a joint communication – with the Armenian National Committee of Canada and the Serbian National Shield Society of Canada – to Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Champagne.

We ask that Canada – as a founding member of UNESCO – take the lead within the UNESCO family, condemn Erdogan's decision and demand that Turkey respect UNESCO's Statement on Hagia Sophia. This is not only an issue concerning Greek Orthodoxy or Christianity, it is an issue of respecting different religions and freedom of choice and freedom of worship.

We, therefore, as Canadians, demand that the sanctity of this world-heritage designation for Hagia Sophia is preserved. Turkey's action must be condemned and Hagia Sophia must be maintained as a museum, permanently ensuring its extraordinary-historical significance, shared by all faiths and peoples.

We trust you will give this matter the attention and action it deserves.

Sincerely,

Dr. Theodore Halatsis
President

Dr. Costas Pappas
Vice-President, Administration and Secretary

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.