

**INTRODUCTION:**

- I am here as president of the Canadian Hellenic Congress, representing our members, and I would like to thank Minister Champagne, and his office, for taking the time to meet with us today to discuss matters of concern to Canadians of Hellenic origin. We hope that today's discussion will help to strengthen the ties between our government and our community, enhancing our mutual cooperation.
- Within the mandate of the Canadian Hellenic Congress, to represent, advance, advocate and promote the interests and concerns of Canadians of Hellenic descent and Hellenism in general, the CHC has communicated with Prime Minister Trudeau and our government, over the past several months, on issues of current concern to Hellenes across Canada.

**EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION:**

- Specifically, we have communicated with the Prime Minister and his office with regard to Turkey's illegal and provocative actions in the Eastern Mediterranean region in violation of the sovereign territories of Greece and Cyprus. Turkey's aggressive actions in the region, over the past few months, have raised tensions to dangerously high levels and this is cause for great concern to us.

**HAGIA SOPHIA:**

- We have also communicated with the Prime Minister and with you, Minister, on the issue of Hagia Sophia and Turkey's defiant decision, in contravention of international law, to convert the Great Church into a mosque.
- We believe that Turkish President Erdogan's decision reflects a rhetoric of conquest that heightens the alienation of Constantinople's Christian past and brands Turkey's non-Muslims as re-conquered subjects and second-class citizens.

- You will recall, Minister, that our most recent communication with you on the issue of Hagia Sophia, was a joint letter with the Armenian National Committee of Canada (ANCC), and the Serbian National Shield Society of Canada (SNSS) representing the Greek, Armenian and Serbian communities of Canada respectively. In view of Hagia Sophia's UNESCO World Heritage Site status, this is clearly a matter of international concern, not a domestic issue, and given that Canada is a founding member of UNESCO, in our letter, we urged you, as well as, our Prime Minister and our Canadian government,
  - to condemn Turkey's illegal actions and defiance of international law
  - to make a public declaration in support of UNESCO's statement on this matter
  - and to make every diplomatic and political effort to reverse Turkey's decision and to safeguard universal heritage sites.

**ARMS EMBARGO/  
SALE OF MILITARY DRONE OPTICS**

- Another matter of serious concern to our community is the sale by Canada of military drone optics to Turkey, despite the arms embargo in place. Turkey's long history of aggression and human rights violations, as well as, violations to its neighbours' sovereignty, and total disregard for international humanitarian law are well known and reinforce our belief that, as Canadians, we must not, in any way, shape or form, assist the Turkish government by providing military weapons or technology to be used offensively.
- As such, the CHC wrote to Prime Minister Trudeau in June of this year, urging him and our government to recognise the Turkish state's policy of aggression and expansionism in the Middle East and the Mediterranean Sea, to respect the embargo and to cancel the sale of Canadian drone optics to Turkey.

RECOGNITION OF PONTIAN GREEK GENOCIDE

- Another issue that the CHC has been advocating for the past **several years** is the recognition of the Pontian Greek Genocide by the Government of Canada and we hope this will soon become a reality.

CONCLUSION:

- In closing, Canada has a long-standing track record as a staunch supporter of the rule of law and of human rights and religious freedom, and **MUST** uphold international law by publicly condemning the Turkish government's illegal actions.
- We see it as a choice between joining with those nations who condemn and work to end significant and sustained human rights and international law violations and illegal actions, or staying deafeningly silent in the face of these violations and actions. Because we believe our choices define us as people and as nations, it is our hope that Canada will choose to be a nation that works alongside other nations to uphold human rights and international law.