



The Status and Issues of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
2017 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, Poland

Working Session 6

**Fundamental Freedoms II,
Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion, or Belief**

September 14, 2017

Presented on behalf of the Order of St. Andrew the Apostle
by

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Introduction

On behalf of the Order of Saint Andrew the Apostle (the Order), I thank you for allowing me to discuss with you the difficult environment faced every day by the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul.

The Order is a United States-based organization of Orthodox Christian laymen who have been honored for their outstanding service to the Orthodox Church by the granting of a Patriarchal title, or offikion, *Archon of the Great Church of Christ*, bestowed upon them by His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch, and personally conferred by the Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in America, His Eminence the Archbishop of America. The Ecumenical Patriarch's flock is global and covers all continents. It includes the Carpatho-Russian Church in the United States as well as all Greek Orthodox Christians located in north, south and central America. Thus, the Order is under the canonical jurisdiction of Ecumenical Patriarchate and speaks today on behalf of and in support of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Archon's mission is to defend the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which is headquartered in Istanbul, Turkey, to promote its well-being and advancement, to preserve its important role in the spiritual life of Orthodox Christians, as well as all persons of faith in the world. Our mission is further founded on the precepts of the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes **freedom of religion** as one of the **four basic human rights**. Members of the Order are found in the U. S. Congress, the Executive Branch, and all levels of government, in academia, the professions, business, and the arts. Please refer to the material we have made available to the delegates of this Conference as well as the Order's website www.archons.org.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate was founded by the Apostle Andrew in 37 A. D. and has served as a vital religious center for Orthodox Christians ever since. In 451 A. D., the Fourth Ecumenical Council of the Christian Church in Chalcedon (now Kadikoy) conferred upon the Bishop of Constantinople equal rank to Rome and special responsibilities throughout the rest of the world. Constantinople was founded on the ancient city Byzantium by Emperor Constantine the Great in

324 A.D. The title “Ecumenical Patriarch” dates from the sixth century and confirms the stature in which the Bishop of the city, then known as Constantinople and now as Istanbul, and has been held by the rest of Christendom ever since. The four ancient Patriarchates, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem were established by the Undivided Christian Church at the First Four Ecumenical Councils. Our Ecumenical Patriarch, His All-Holiness the Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome, Bartholomew I, is the 270th successor of St Andrew, and is the spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul has faced a hostile environment, and its very existence threatened by government decrees and policies. The Istanbul Pogrom in 1955¹, decreased the Orthodox Greek population from 1.5 million in 1923 to 67,550 in 1965, and to 3,000 in 2005².

The then Prime Minister Erdoğan (now President) of Turkey and others³ in the national government initiated some positive steps that may be considered the beginning of a foundation upon which the pillars of religious freedom and institutional human rights for the Ecumenical Patriarchate can be rebuilt. However, the road to complete and unfettered religious freedom in Turkey continues to be **uphill**, and **challenging**, given the fact that the state continues its interference in the internal administration and operation of both the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Orthodox parishes and foundations in Turkey.

In May 2, 2016, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in its report⁴ recommended that the US State Department add Turkey to the list of Tier 2 Countries; that is, “countries of particular concern” whose governments engage in or tolerate at least one of the elements of the "systematic, ongoing, and egregious" standard, but do not fully meet the CPC standard. The (USCIRF) report⁵ of April 30, 2015, also included Turkey in the Tier 2 list.

The April 2017 USCIRF report stated “Turkey has returned properties expropriated from religious minority communities, provided dual citizenship to Greek Orthodox Metropolitans so they can participate in their church’s Holy Synod, and revised school curricula”, but the **“longstanding religious freedom concerns persist pertaining to religious properties, listing of religious affiliations on national identification cards, and education. Based on these concerns, USCIRF again places Turkey on its Tier 2 in 2017”**⁶.

While we are mindful of events in Turkey that have transpired since July 15, 2016, it is not our intention to comment upon the elected government’s response to those events. This paper reviews the key issues of concern relating only to religion freedom.

¹ Speros Vryonis, Jr., The Mechanism of Catastrophe, GreekWorks.com, NY, 2005.

² A. Icduygu, S. Toktas, B.A. Soner, The politics of population in a nation-building process: Emigration of non-muslims from turkey, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 31(2), 2008, 358-389.

³ In 2012 the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly invited the Ecumenical Patriarch to appear before the Inter-Party Committee for the drafting of a new Constitution. This was the first time in the history of the Turkish republic that a leader of a religious minority group addressed the parliament. On this occasion, His All Holiness discussed religious freedom and other related issues. He presented an 18-page document prepared by all the minorities in Turkey, concerning freedom of religion and other related issues. www.christianpost.com, February 27, 2012.

⁴ USCIRF 2016 Annual Report-International Freedom of Religion, May 2, 2016

⁵ USCIRF 2015 Annual Report-International Freedom of Religion, April 30, 2015

⁶ USCIRF 2017 Annual Report-International Freedom of Religion, April 2016, p. 186.

The election of a new Ecumenical Patriarch

Today religious matters in Turkey are coordinated and governed by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet).

In 1923 and 1970, however, the Governors of Istanbul issued decrees imposing restrictions on the election of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Metropolitan Bishops (the “Metropolitans” or “Hierarchs”) who elect him requiring that both the Ecumenical Patriarch and the hierarchs who vote for him be Turkish citizens (the “mandates”). These mandates pose a serious problem for the Ecumenical Patriarchate because a man desiring to pursue Orthodox religious studies in Turkey has no access to such education, and the number of Turkish born Orthodox clerics qualified to succeed or to vote is dwindling.

The Canons of the Orthodox Church state that the Ecumenical Patriarch is to be elected freely from all hierarchs of the Ecumenical Patriarchate throughout the world, not just those in Turkey. In 2004, the Turkish government accepted an alteration to the composition of the twelve-member Turkish-citizen Standing Synod of Metropolitan Bishops in Constantinople (the “Synod”), and to include six Bishops from outside Turkey with no Turkish citizenship, and to also convene biannual convocations of all bishops in his jurisdiction. Turkey, however, declined to waive its requirements that only a Turkish citizen be elected Orthodox Patriarch.

In 2011, the then Prime Minister Erdoğan (now President) issued a decree (the “Executive Reform Statement”), which waived the five-year residency Turkish citizenship requirement for Orthodox hierarchs wishing to apply for Turkish citizenship. Metropolitans from outside Turkey, who fall within the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, have been allowed to apply for “exceptional” Turkish citizenship. As of 2015, twenty-six hierarchs under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate applied. Many were granted “exceptional” Turkish citizenship, and several applications were denied “because it was found to be not in line with the requirements of the law in effect.”

There are still several problems with this process. First, the decree is discretionary and, therefore, may be rescinded by a subsequent national government. Second, it is not clear under the present Constitution whether an executive decree from Ankara overrides local Istanbul mandates, what the Diyanet’s role is, and how all of this may impact religious freedom. Third, there is no rational reason why an Orthodox hierarch must be a Turkish citizen simply to participate in the election of a new Ecumenical Patriarch.

We look forward to the day when no interference whatsoever will be exerted on the internal proceedings of the Ecumenical Patriarchate or of any other religious group. As Vice President Joseph Biden so eloquently stated in July of 2014: *The great faith of the Greek Orthodox Church should have what people of all faiths deserve: the freedom to practice one’s religion without any restriction.*

Freedom to conduct religious services and the Patriarchate’s Ecumenical status

The Order recognizes some very small steps have been taken by the Turkish Government to conduct religious services freely.

Beginning in 2010, and each succeeding year thereafter through 2015, the Government of Turkey allowed the Divine Liturgy on the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, on August 15, to be celebrated at the historic Christian Orthodox Soumela Monastery (founded in 386 A.D. during the reign of Emperor Theodosios I; now officially a museum), near Trabzon on the Black Sea; Trabzon (previously Trapezounta) is a site where during and after the WWI the Orthodox populous was forced by the Ottomans under Sultan Mehmed V Reşâd to convert to Islam; an estimated 1.1 million Pontic Greeks among them many Christian clergy were massacred and the surviving were forced to abandon their homes; this is known as the well documented “Pontic Greek genocide”.^{7,8}

Permitting a Divine Liturgy at the Soumela Monastery brought excitement within the Orthodox populous. The liturgy was celebrated by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and was attended by thousands of pilgrims; the Ecumenical Patriarch recognized that “Such actions are evidence that respect of religious freedom is growing in Turkey. This is a matter of principles and values in relation to basic human rights”.⁹

However, on 8 August 2016, the monastery was “*closed for repairs*”, a mere week ahead of the anticipated religious celebration. Our hopes are that these repairs will be concluded in a timely fashion, so that celebrations will resume next year, on August 15, 2018.

The Government has allowed services in other significant religious sites, previously converted to state museums, such as the Akdamar Church near Van, the St. Peter’s Church in Antakya (Antakya was previously called Antiochia and was a center of Christianity), the St. Nicholas of Myra Church near Demre (Demre was previously called Myra and had a substantial Christian community), the House of the Virgin Mary near Selçuk (Selçuk was previously called Aghios Theologos, and Ayasoluk) in the Izmir Province, and some others. Christianity thrived in Asia Minor for almost two millennia (all Seven major Christian Churches of the Revelation¹⁰ were in Asia Minor), and numerous significant and historic religious sites and shrines exist in today’s Turkey, some in tolerable condition, and many in ruins. Nevertheless, many of these sites are visited by millions of tourists for their historical and religious value, thus creating revenue to local Turkish merchants.

The Order recognizes all steps undertaken by the Turkish Government. However, notwithstanding the recognition and appreciation voiced by the Patriarch, the Order regrets to report that two historic churches, which had been maintained as museums, have now been converted into mosques.¹¹ One is Hagia Sophia in Trabzon (near Soumela), hailed as one of the finest examples of late Byzantine architecture.¹² The other is Hagia Sophia of Nicaea, site of the

⁷ The Plight of Religious Minorities: Can Religious Pluralism Survive? - United States Congress, Committee on International Relations House of Representatives, Serial No. 109-202, June 20, 2006, page 51

⁸ The Armenian Genocide: Wartime Radicalization Or Premeditated Continuum - edited by Richard Hovannisian, Somerset, N.J., Eurospan [distributor], 2006, Page 272

⁹ www.patriarchate.org, The Feast Day of the Dormition in Trapezounda; video uploaded August 30, 2010

¹⁰ Revelation 1:11

¹¹ “Another Byzantine Church Becomes a Mosque in Turkey.” [www. Al-Monitor.com](http://www.Al-Monitor.com), 7-Aug-13.

¹² The New York Times, February 8, 2012

First Ecumenical Council in 325 AD and the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 AD.¹³ In both instances, many Turkish scholars and local Turkish citizens voiced opposition to the conversions, but to no avail.

The last two years, there has been an even more disturbing development: various nationalist Islamic groups advocate changing the status of **Hagia Sophia in Istanbul**, to a mosque. **Hagia Sophia in Istanbul** has been a **UNESCO World Heritage Site and Museum** since 1935, and as a Museum is visited by many thousands daily. Historically, Hagia Sophia was constructed in 537 A.D., almost a millennium before the Ottoman Empire, and functioned as a Christian church and as the seat of the Patriarch until 1453.

In 2015, the Turkish Parliament was asked to turn **Hagia Sophia Museum** into a mosque, with the intent to restore Hagia Sophia as a "symbol of the Conquest of Istanbul". Turkey's deputy prime minister promised that Hagia Sophia soon would be "smiling" again as a mosque.¹⁴ Similarly, the leader of the Great Union Party (BBP), Mustafa Destici, made the statement: "Let Greece and the world hear that Hagia Sophia is a mosque. With the blessing of Allah, religious ceremonies will soon take place and prayers will be read there again". At the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in 2015, we reported our concerns about aspirations among some in Turkey to re-convert the Hagia Sophia Museum into a mosque. Our concerns were met with doubt.

However, in 2016, aspirations to turn Hagia Sophia Museum into a mosque took yet another step. On May 28, 2016, thousands participated in a morning Muslim prayer outside Hagia Sophia, and on July 2, 2016, a muezzin recited the Qu'ran and the Muslim call to prayer from within the Hagia Sophia Museum broadcast for the first time in 85 years from the minarets. In addition, a permanent imam for the site has been appointed. In October 2016, a commentator on the media channel Kanal A reported that the 1935 decision to convert Hagia Sophia from a mosque to a Museum "was part of a British and American conspiracy".

On June 23, 2017, a Muslim prayer service was held at the Hagia Sophia, attended by Turkish officials, and was internationally televised. The same day, statements were issued objecting to the event by governments and UNESCO, whereas the US State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert called on the Turkish government to "preserve the Hagia Sophia in a way that respects its complex history".

We also reiterate the words of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew that we maintain a "respect for Islam" with a concurrent call for the same courtesy to be paid to "places of worship of our forefathers" as well.

The Order has met with USCIRF regarding the Muslim prayers at the Hagia Sophia Museum, and with individuals in the United States Senate, the United States House of Representatives, and the Executive Branch at the White House. The Order believes Hagia Sophia in Istanbul should remain a museum. Converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque will absolutely erase any traces of harmony and good will and, unfortunately, will result in a spiral of distrust and recriminations that

¹³ The Economist, July 27, 2013

¹⁴ Reuters (UK edition) May 30, 2014

cannot be repaired. The Order further believes that converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque will threaten Turkey's international standing, as already stated in previous reports.

Finally, regarding the use of the term "Ecumenical" one must simply note that, contrary to the rest of the world, the Turkish government does not recognize the "Ecumenical" status of the Patriarch and Patriarchate as the world's leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians. Turkish authorities do not allow the use of the term or title of "Ecumenical" for any religious activity whatsoever even though it has been used since the 6th century A.D., and it is recognized by civil and religious authorities throughout the world. Turkey regards the Patriarchate as an institution whose leader is the spiritual head of Orthodox Christians in Turkey alone. Given the fact that the Ecumenical Patriarch is the internationally-recognized global leader of the world's great religions, the government's revisionist characterizations and non-recognition are troubling.

Denial of Legal Personality

The Ecumenical Patriarchate still has no legal identity or personality in Turkey. This is particularly difficult to understand since the institution is 1,700 years old.

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne established the legal position and rights of minorities. Article 40 of the Treaty explicitly grants minorities a variety of freedoms, including the right to establish, manage and control, at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institutions, any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their religion freely therein. The Treaty is an internationally binding agreement and is universally acknowledged.

The European Union (the EU) likewise recognizes the same elements cited in the treaty of Lausanne. In particular, the EU Turkey 2003 Accession Partnership instructs Turkey to conform to European standards with respect to religious freedom.

Notwithstanding the above, the Turkish Government denies legal standing to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Armenian Patriarchate, the Jewish Rabbi's Office and other religious institutions.¹⁵ This lack of legal personality or standing deprives the Ecumenical Patriarchate from owning property, not even the historic churches in which its parishioners worship, and it has no legal authority to direct the use of any assets. It cannot purchase property, and it cannot even own the cemeteries in which its deceased Patriarchs are buried. It is even difficult for the Ecumenical Patriarchate to apply for a necessary permit to repair deteriorating church property.

Instead, church property is owned by government-denominated minority foundations which operate independently of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Because the Patriarchate cannot apply for permits to repair deteriorating property, these properties are at risk. When a church deteriorates sufficiently, the Turkish government can declare that the building be abandoned and can seize it without compensation.

Turkey's General Directorate of Foundations (the "GDF") has exercised rigid and tight control over the day-to-day management of minority foundations, in violation of the Lausanne Treaty. The GDF can arbitrarily delay the election of foundation board members, thus rendering the

¹⁵ 2012 US Commission on International Religious Freedom Report, page 199; *ibid*, 2013 Report, page 269; *ibid*, 2014 Report, page 145; *ibid*, 2016 Report, page 8

foundations functionally inoperative. Another principal way the GDF has restricted the self-management of non-Muslim foundations has been the practice of seizing foundations when it unilaterally deems them to be “no longer of charitable or practical use.”¹⁶ These realities have been greatly responsible for the loss of Patriarchal properties (owned via the foundation system). In 1936, the year the foundation law went into effect, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, its churches and institutions registered approximately 8,000 properties. In 1998 only 2,000 remained, and currently, less than 500. The GDF regulates activities of all religious community foundations and their affiliated properties, 75 Greek Orthodox, 42 Armenian, and 19 Jewish¹⁷. If a foundation becomes inactive, it may succeed to transfer all assets of a foundation to the state.

In a landmark opinion¹⁸, the European Commission for Democracy through Law stressed that the fundamental right of freedom of religion includes the possibility for religious communities to obtain legal personality. The Commission further stated that it could see no justification for not granting such rights to the non-Muslim religious communities in Turkey.

In 2008 the European Court of Human Rights ordered the return of the Büyükada Orphanage to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, notwithstanding the Turkish Government’s argument that the Ecumenical Patriarchate lacks legal standing to hold title.¹⁹ Even though the deed was later registered in the Patriarchate’s name, the Government still insisted that “the institution represented by Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew does not have a legal personality under current Turkish law.”²⁰ In August 2011, the Government issued a decree that some confiscated properties would be returned. Indeed, several parcels of property have been returned (most notably, forested land on the hill surrounding Halki, a former school building now housing the Turkish Government’s EU Entry Ministry in Istanbul, and a building housing the Greek Consulate near Taksim Square), but they have been returned to minority foundations with no true leadership, and not to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, their historic owner, and thus these returns are deemed meaningless. Despite the EU Court’s decision, in April 2016, the Istanbul Forestry Directorate filed a lawsuit, which is currently on-going, requesting the *cancellation of the deeds for two properties returned to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 2012*. One of the two is the forested land where the Halki Seminary and monastery is located.

The Order is hopeful that the ruling of the European Court, which is to say that the Patriarchate can hold legal title in its own name, will henceforth favourably resolve the issue of legal standing for all the Turkish non-Muslim minorities, thereby reinforcing and confirming the importance of private and religious communal property rights.

¹⁶ “A Tale of Reciprocity,” Dilek Kurban and Konstantinos Tsitsalakis, Research Center for Minority Groups, Testev Publications, July 2010, page 11.

¹⁷ U.S. International Freedom report, Turkey, 2011, page 5.

¹⁸ European Commission for Democracy through Law, Opinion No. 535/2009, www.venice.coe.int

¹⁹ www.echr.coe.int, Case of Fener Rum Patrikligi, case no. 14340/05, 8/07/2008

²⁰ Public Statement by Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arinc, in January 2011. He also stated that the Government of Turkey was “seeking to find an arrangement that recognizes the existence of the patriarchate but does not offer a legal personality to it, in line with the Lausanne Treaty and our laws.”

Halki School of Theology

The Ecumenical Patriarchate is unable to train new clergy in Turkey since its theological school was forcibly closed by the Turkish Government, in 1971, when a law banning private higher education institutions precluded it from admitting new students. Its closure constitutes a violation of Articles 37-44 of the Treaty of Lausanne, the United Nations Charter, the European Convention of Human Rights, and the basic Principles on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The Theological School of Halki (Halki) was founded in 1844 by Patriarch Germanos IV on the site of a much older monastery of the Holy Trinity on the island of Halki (now called Heybeliada). Halki served the Orthodox Christian community worldwide, and until 1971, almost a thousand students have graduated from Halki, including distinguished clerics, theologians, and most of the Ecumenical Patriarchs.

Following its closure, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, lacking any source for theological education in Turkey, is required to send young Orthodox Christian men desiring to enter the priesthood or study theology, abroad, at great cost, and it has had difficulties in finding the staff needed to carry out its administrative responsibilities within Turkey, and its world-wide mission.

Every president of the United States (beginning with President Carter and all his successors, including President Obama), Vice President Joseph Biden, many U.S. Secretaries of State (including Hillary Clinton and John Kerry), a host of European Union officials, many international bodies, including the Pope of Rome, have repeatedly called on the Government of Turkey to lift the discriminatory restrictions and allow the re-opening of Halki under the auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Meetings between the OSCE, President Obama, and the Secretary of State Clinton took place in 2009 and 2010 to discuss Turkey's treatment of religious minorities, as well as general religious freedom conditions. Turkey, since 2008, has been on a "watch list" of countries requiring close monitoring due to the serious nature and extent of the religious freedom violations engaged in or tolerated by its government.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew tirelessly has met and repeatedly discussed this issue with high ranking officials of the Turkish government, including Prime Minister Erdoğan (now President of the Turkish Republic). The President of the Diyanet, Mehmet Gormez, publicly supported the reopening of Halki when he met with the Ecumenical Patriarch in July 2012, as already stated in previous reports.²¹

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, confirming all the above, has issued the following statement:

The (Turkish) Government's continued failure to follow through on the long-promised reopening of the Halki Seminary is a disturbing indication of a lack of genuine will to resolve this longstanding religious freedom issue. (Emphasis added.)²²

In addition, USCIRF issued the following statement²³:

²¹ www.parikiaki.com, July 9, 2012

²² USCIRF Report, November 20, 2014, page 146

²³ USCIRF Report, November 20, 2014, Turkey: Reopen Halki

“The ongoing closure of Halki Seminary flies in the face of the fundamental right of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate to educate and train its clergy in Turkey so it can lead the community’s faithful around the world.” The same statement continues: “We encourage the U.S. government to urge the Turkish government to publicly commit to a specific date in the immediate future to reopen Halki.” (Emphasis added.).

For many years, urgent petitions by the Ecumenical Patriarch, the Order of St Andrew, USCIRF, and many others to allow the reopening of Halki have gone unheeded.

Notwithstanding the above, the Halki seminary today remains closed. The continuing Istanbul mandates coupled with the forced closure of this pre-eminent theological school continues to exert undue pressure on the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Turkey.

The reopening of the Halki School of Theology is a critical step to the restoration of full religious freedom for the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Property Confiscation and the Return of Confiscated Property

As aforementioned, the Turkish Government has confiscated thousands of properties from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. A separate paper on the related issue of Property Confiscation and the Return of Confiscated Property was presented by the Order in Session 13 of this Conference in 2014. In this document, the Order further describes the process by which Patriarchal property has been confiscated by the Turkish government and explains that the August 2011 decree allowing for the return of confiscated property often has been stalemated or applied in an unjust manner.

Recent fraudulent articles targeting His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

In mid-August, 2016, Oriental Review website published an article titled "Does Turkey Need Patriarch Bartholomew?" allegedly written by Ambassador Arthur Hughes. Ambassador Hughes categorically denied authorship, contribution and any knowledge whatsoever of the article.²⁴ Following the protest of Ambassador Arthur Hughes, the article was withdrawn by Oriental Review.

We are of course troubled by such events and misinformation and would hope that the government of Turkey shares our concern.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Order recognizes and supports **all positive** steps taken to date by the Turkish authorities, which we hope will eventually lead to restoring full religious freedom for the Ecumenical Patriarchate and for the other non-Muslim religious institutions in Turkey. However, much still needs to be accomplished. The Order supports that the Ecumenical Patriarchate should be able to conduct religious services at our Holy sites at will, rather than having to ask the Turkish government for “permission”. Further, the continued return of property to the Ecumenical Patriarchate should be accompanied by the Foundations’ ability to properly function, conduct

²⁴ <http://www.archons.org/news/detail.asp?id=917>.

elections and achieve their stated purpose. President Obama’s Chief of Staff supported the positions of the Order,²⁵ and President Donald J. Trump, quoted in the Secretary of State’s introduction to the 2016 International Freedom of Religion Report, released August, 2017, has stated:

[We] pray for the strength and wisdom to achieve a better tomorrow-one where good people of all faiths, Christians and Muslims and Jewish and Hindu, can follow their hearts and worship according to their conscience.”

The Order, therefore, recommends the following

- (a) Officially recognize that the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its institutions have legal personality and standing, with rights to acquire, own, build and repair property. If necessary, the laws related to minority foundations should be amended.
- (b) Officially recognize the “Ecumenical” status of the Patriarch and Patriarchate.
- (c) Fairly and expeditiously implement the August 2011 decree allowing for the return of all confiscated property.
- (d) Allow the Ecumenical Patriarchate to reopen the Theological School of Halki.
- (e) Abstain completely from any national or local government interference related to the internal governance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
- (f) Fully implement the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Turkey has subscribed, and provide equal rights to all religious minority communities.

Closing

In closing, the Order joins our fellow Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other brothers and sisters of all faiths to condemn the current acts of religious intolerance in Turkey but also in the Middle East, including the forced evacuation of people from their homes and countries, the destruction of World Heritage historic monuments, and barbaric attacks on innocent civilians by Islamic State-inspired terrorists.

As the Ecumenical Patriarch has proclaimed, “we cannot remain indifferent or silent before such irrational persecution, cultural intolerance and appalling loss of life”.

We ask world leaders to take whatever steps necessary to end this calamity.

Finally, we reiterate our belief that the great faith of the Greek Orthodox Church should have what all people of all faiths deserve:

The freedom to practice one’s religion without any restriction.

Thank you.

²⁵ Issuu.com/orderstandrew/docs/2011-02.03.04.05