



ORDER OF SAINT ANDREW THE APOSTLE

ARCHONS OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

Human Rights for the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Minority in Turkey

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

2007 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Warsaw, Poland

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As Prepared:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this important and august assembly.

- **The Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church in Istanbul is an endangered species. There is an almost 2000 year history for the antecedents of this Holy Office.**
- **Since the beginning of the Turkish Republic 85 years ago and earlier there has been a systematic and calculated drive by Turkey to diminish the role and resources of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.**
- **Only a short window of time is left for changes to be made by Turkey that will secure the Ecumenical Patriarchate's survival**
- **The Turkish citizens of Greek heritage (and by extension the Christian minority) in Turkey is an endangered species. The percentage that Christians represent in the Turkish population has dropped from 20% to 0.3 % over the last century, also the result of a systematic plan. Turkish citizens of Greek heritage represent no more than 0.03%.**
- **Basic Human Rights have been violated by Turkey over a century of planned effort to come to this point for the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Minority and the Christian minority in Turkey.**

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- **The internationally sanctioned expulsion of Greeks from Turkey in 1922-23 and the pogroms against Greeks in Istanbul in 1955 represent signature events that demonstrated the ongoing Turkish plan.**
- **The harsh demographic results cannot be questioned as proof of this deep strategy for the Turkish Republic**
- **Remedies are urgently needed**

Think about these statements for a moment.

The Ecumenical Patriarch is the spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians and, since 1054, is the first among equals of the Major Sees of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Ecumenical Patriarch represents an almost two thousand year tradition of spiritual leadership emanating from St. Andrew in 37 A.D. While the status of some of the other Orthodox Christian Patriarchates in the world is not ideal and at times has been tenuous, none has reached the critical endangerment stage facing the Ecumenical Patriarch.

If the issues of the survival of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Minority in Turkey were on an environmental agenda as opposed to religious freedom and human rights agendas, the extinction of these valuable resources would be at the top of endangered species lists. NGOs, academics and environmental activists would be clamoring for a comprehensive solution that would produce survival and restoration of a nurturing environment. Alas, the noise about these problems has not reached a level where the world is hearing the message and galvanizing action for conservation and nurture of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Minority.

The current Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I is known and applauded for his support of stewardship of the environment as an integral part of God's creation. This fact represents a supreme irony: Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I is a champion for the environment while his own Office is threatened with extinction.

The Republic of Turkey, taking a responsible role, is partnering with other countries and many NGOs to preserve the biodiversity hotspot in the Caucasus, a small part of which is in Turkey. A biodiversity hotspot is one of the rare places on earth that have the richest varieties of plant and animal life. These natural assets are worth preserving. The Turkish Republic should be encouraged to apply this same sense of responsibility and zeal to human rights and cultural and religious diversity and freedom. The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Minority are elements of Turkish diversity worthy of preserving and nurturing.

Key facts about basic human rights and the Ecumenical Patriarchate:

- The Ecumenical Patriarchate is not able to gain recognition as a legal entity in Turkey. Other churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, have this same problem. The Pope has recently petitioned the Republic of Turkey to correct this practice.
- One consequence of not being a legal entity is technically not being able to own property. The Ecumenical Patriarchate is continually vulnerable to confiscation of its

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- properties and other indignities; over 75% of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's and related institutions' properties have been confiscated through underhanded methods.
- Turkish Courts uphold predatory and confiscatory actions against the Ecumenical Patriarch, its institutions and its resources.
 - The Ecumenical Patriarch must be a Turkish citizen at the time of his election. Even as Turkish citizens the Ecumenical Patriarch and his fellow hierarchs, priest and staff, cannot exercise the rights of citizens.
 - The Metropolitans and Bishops who serve at the Ecumenical Patriarchate must also be Turkish citizens.
 - The Halki School of Theology was closed in 1971 meaning that no new Priests can be trained in Turkey and no succession developed for the leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Even Turkish citizens who wish to be educated in the Orthodox Faith cannot pursue that calling.
 - The Turkish government has interfered with rights of Orthodox Christians around the world by harassing and denying the Ecumenical Patriarch from using the title Ecumenical, a decision not within the authority of that government. A Turkish Prosecutor recently brought charges against the Ecumenical Patriarch for using the term "ecumenical." Those charges have been dropped, but represent a true picture of the constant pressure and harassment on the being of the Ecumenical Patriarch.
 - The Turkish government is placing exorbitant taxes on social service organizations supported by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, for example, the Balukli Hospital that serves all Turkish citizens without discrimination (ironically, in this case, the Turkish Republic is interfering with the human rights of members of the majority seeking basic health care).
 - Turkish groups consistently plan harm to the Ecumenical Patriarch and his associates, including a recent plot by a group of retired Army officers to assassinate the Ecumenical Patriarch, the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch and a prominent Jewish business man, Thankfully, the plot was uncovered in time to prevent this act. The right to life is the most basic of human rights.

The result is a systematic and continuous harassment that produces a poisonous environment in which the Ecumenical Patriarch and hierarchical colleagues must live. Is there any question that the Ecumenical Patriarchate has been targeted for extinction? The Turkish rules for the operation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate seek to deny its ecumenicity and the means to sustain itself and the connections to the world-wide network of believers who would applaud Turkey's decision to support a viable and thriving Ecumenical Patriarchate. .

In the case of the Greek Minority in Turkey, the issues of Human Rights and Religious Freedom are closely intertwined, perhaps inseparable.

Key facts about human rights for the Greek Minority in Turkey

- Ethnic Greek Turkish citizens were expelled several times in the early 20th century.
- The internationally sanctioned mutual expulsion of Greeks from Turkey and Turks from Greece in 1922-23 (about 3 or 4 to 1 Greeks moving) set the stage for the treatment of Greeks in the new Turkish Republic {Note: Bruce Clark the author of "Twice a

Stranger,” a balanced chronicle of the events surrounding the Treaty of Lausanne says that the most conservative estimate of Greeks expelled from Turkey in 1922 was 1.2 million with the real number estimated to be twice as large). The comparable number for Turks expelled from Greece is conservatively about 400,000 with higher estimates reaching 500,000.

- The pogroms and attacks of 1955 in Istanbul caused the next deep cut in the Greek Minority in that city of over 100,000 to the 3,000 of today. The use of paramilitary groups provided a veneer of deniability to the Turkish Government.
- Properties were seized, education was disrupted, heavy taxes were targeted on the Greek minority, business was limited.
- Families fled for their lives and their livelihoods.

How can 3000 people in Istanbul and a few thousand more elsewhere in Turkey represent a minority? We suppose that was the idea. Can anyone argue with the result? Is there any question that a Greek Minority group at near zero was the desired goal of almost a century of intentional activity on the part of Turkey? The Greek Minority in Turkey went from millions in 1922 to a few thousands today. Not accidental.

Without significant action soon, the world and Turkey will lose precious, irreplaceable spiritual, cultural and historical human resources. Both the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Minority are endangered species through the systematic and planned efforts of the Turkish government and related organizations.

Please allow me a moment of personal privilege. I am the son of parents with their families were refugees from Asia Minor several times in the early 20th century (an area near Izmir and across from the island of Chios called Karabourni by the Greeks and Karaburun by the Turks), culminating in the final expulsion of 1922. I can tell you that I have no animosity for the Turkish people and hope that they have none for me. In fact, I recall great stories from my maternal grandmother about both the kindnesses and friendships of Greeks and Turks in Asia Minor. I also heard stories about atrocities and horrors, which once started, went both ways.

The Ecumenical Patriarch is the shepherd for hundreds of millions of Orthodox around the world and his Holy See is both the spiritual beacon and anchor for the Eastern Orthodox Church. Those outside of Turkey are his flock and will continue to press for his safety, freedom of movement, for access and for restoration of the means to sustain this important spiritual center. The recent presence of Pope Benedict XVI at The Ecumenical Patriarchate punctuated the role of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Christendom. As is widely known, the Pope was invited to Turkey by the Turkish Government as a Head of State rather than the spiritual leader of Roman Catholicism. The Ecumenical Patriarch's earlier invitation to the Pope was nullified by the Turkish Government.

Many of the same issues apply to the Greek minority in Istanbul and Turkey with freedom of assembly being an important addition. After a recent meeting of representatives of the Greek community in one of the schools that is allowed to exist, representatives of the government came and confiscated the computers on which the proceedings of the meeting had been entered.

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The time has come to shift from the past to the present and the future.

The Turkish Republic has done some things that offer a glimmer of light that is then dashed by subsequent action. The major example is Turkish Prime Minister's Human Rights Advisory Board Report [October, 2004]

An excerpt from the report:

“Rather than monitor developments over the concept of ‘minority’ and minority law in the world, Turkey remains stuck in the year 1923, and so misinterprets the Lausanne Treaty. The understanding of citizenship must be reconsidered and the example of multi-cultured, multi-identified, democratic, liberal and pluralist society model in Europe must be followed.”

The content of this Turkish Human Rights report was hailed by minority groups only to be pressed back into the old ways by the prosecution of the two Turkish academics who wrote the report for inciting people (minorities) to hatred and threatening the “unitary” state. The case resulted in an acquittal. However, on September 20, 2007 the Supreme Court of Appeals overturned the acquittal and reinstated the charges.

The rapprochement of the Turkish and Greek Governments over the last several years has been stimulated by Turkey's potential accession to the European Union and by the emergence of both Turkey and Greece as key distribution points for oil and gas from Russia and the Muslim nations that spawned from the former Soviet Republics. One could add to this list the great interest in the Christian and Greek antiquities that are located inside Turkey. One should also add the strengthening relationship between Turkey and Israel.

The sum effect in Turkey and elsewhere of these present and future economic, religious and cultural dynamics suggests an even more complex problem for Turkey. The natural expectation arising from these developments is the continuous exchange of Turkish, Greek, European, Middle Eastern, Asian, African and American business people, scientists, professionals, academics and skilled workers. The character of these exchanges will not be two-day trips, but multi-year assignments with families. This phenomenon is already occurring within the EU and the countries are learning how to adjust.

The development of the new “economic minorities” that will accompany Turkish economic leadership, economic partnerships and modern commerce will test Turkey. These people will have expectations of freedom of movement, of assembly, of religion and culture, of education for their children, a sense of family and personal security, financial security and the ability to own property and businesses. If they do not find this kind of environment, then they will not come. If they do not come, then Turkey will not succeed in its leadership and partnership roles and will not set the stage for their own people to progress in this exchange.

What we are describing is a new, mutually beneficial, commerce-driven exchange of populations that brings people together rather than separates them. For Turkey, it brings to memory some of the pragmatic behavior exhibited during the days of the Ottoman Empire.

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What must Turkey do to erase the pattern of oppression, confiscation of property and resources and predatory tax and business policies that has characterized the treatment of minorities historically?

- **Restore and respect full titular, official, legal, and financial status for the Ecumenical Patriarchate.**
- **Recognize the Ecumenical Patriarch's ecumenicity by removing citizenship restrictions for the Patriarch, hierarchs, priests, deacons and key lay staff.**
- **Create a reality of fairness in its dealings with old and new minorities in line with the Turkish Report on Human Rights cited above.**
- **Agree to the reopening of the Halki Theological School and accept a faculty and student body from all over the world.**
- **Restore properties or compensate the Ecumenical Patriarchate and individual members of the Greek Minority for losses of property.**
- **In recognition of both the past and the future, harmonize Turkish Law and Judicial Practices with the rights of minorities, as defined in the Treaty of Lausanne; in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); in the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; and in the OSCE Helsinki Accords, the Vienna Concluding Document, and the Charter of Paris," not to mention the accession requirements of the European Union.**

The window is closing on the existence of Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Greek Minority and the Christian minority in Turkey. Action is needed now for the good of all parties.

Thank you for your time and attention.