

FREE AGIA SOPHIA COUNCIL OF AMERICA

Chris Spirou, President

September 16, 2009

His Excellency Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
Prime Minister, Republic of Turkey
Ankara, Turkey

Your Excellency Prime Minister Erdoğan,

I am writing to inform you that our organizations, “The International Congregation of Agia Sophia,” the “Free Agia Sophia Council of America,” and the “Free Agia Sophia Council of Europe,” and our members from throughout the world will visit Istanbul in September of 2010. The purpose of our Congregation’s visit is to conduct Holy Liturgy Services in the Holy Church of Agia Sophia, the Great Church of Christianity and the Symbol of the Orthodox Christian Faith until the Holy Church’s seizure by the Ottoman Turkish forces on May 29, 1453.

We, the “International Congregation of Agia Sophia,” are the religious heirs to the Great Church and the Holy Basilica’s Congregation. We are the Congregation of the Holy Site where for nearly a thousand (1000) years (537 to 1453 AD) our forefathers sang the praise and sought the blessings of God Almighty.

Mister Prime Minister, five hundred fifty six (556) years have passed since the occupation of our church: more than five centuries of occupation, desecration, sacrilege, abuse, neglect, and disrespect— actions which are neither practiced nor condoned by the religion of Islam. Years and actions that a world which claims to be civilized should no longer accept or tolerate.

Prime Minister Erdoğan, on Friday, September 17, 2010, our Congregation will come to Istanbul to conduct Holy Liturgy Services in the Church of Agia Sophia. September 17 is the day the Orthodox Christian religion celebrates the holy feast day of Sophia, Faith, Hope and Love.

As the political leader of the State in which our Holy Church, Agia Sophia, is located, we invite you to join us in what shall be a “Pilgrimage to the Holy Church of Agia Sophia,” similar to the pilgrimages in which our religious ancestors took part for 916 years before the Great Church was violently taken from our Christian forbearers.

Prime Minister Erdoğan, we shall invite on the same date, September 17, 2010, other major religious and political leaders of the world to join us in what will be the first International Pilgrimage and Prayer in 556 years to be held in the Holy Church of Agia Sophia, one of the oldest Christian churches in the world still standing.

We expect the International Gathering and Prayer in the Holy Church of Agia Sophia to serve as the focal point for an International Summit of Peace and Prayer under the golden dome of the Holy Church of Agia Sophia, the dome under which the Great Schism of the Eastern and Western Christian Churches took place in 1057 AD. Under that same dome on September 17, 2010, not only Christians but people of all faiths will be invited to come together. Where the great separation occurred, the seeds of unity and peace shall be planted.

We believe the International Pilgrimage and Prayer in the Holy Church of Agia Sophia provides a unique opportunity for the political and religious leaders of the world to gather and to unite in peace and prayer.

What better place than in the Holy Church of Agia Sophia, God's Holy Wisdom, for the world's leaders to pledge that they shall not participate in wars "in the name of the Lord," shall not incite religious hatred, shall not pit one religion against another, and shall not use political and military might to deny a human being his or her most fundamental rights, those of freedom of expression and of religious worship.

Prime Minister Erdoğan, the United Nations' Commission on Human Rights, on April 24, 2003 adopted resolution 2003/54 entitled "**Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance.**" The resolution carries this mandate:

"The Commission on Human Rights, urges states to recognize the right of all persons to worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief and to establish and maintain places for these purposes."

Mister Prime Minister, please allow me a historical note which refers to the identity and the Holiness of the Mother Church of Christianity, Agia Sophia. Mr. Prime Minister, in 537 AD, the Christian Roman Emperor Justinian completed the construction of the Holy Church of Agia Sophia. On December 23, of the same year, the Christian Patriarch of Constantinople Menas, consecrated the Great Church and named it Agia Sophia, "God's Holy Wisdom".

It is said that upon entering the majestic Cathedral, the day of its Consecration, Emperor Justinian exclaimed: "*Solomon, I have outdone thee!*" comparing the Holy Church of Agia Sophia to the Great Temple built by King Solomon in Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Erdoğan, nothing like the Holy Church of Agia Sophia had been built in the Orthodox Christian world before or has been built since. Nothing!

The Holy Church of Agia Sophia, as it stands today was conceived, was built, was consecrated, and functioned as the Great Church of Christianity, the Basilica and the Symbol of the Orthodox Christian religion for nearly a thousand (1000) years. In the hearts, in the minds, and in the souls of the Christian faithful around the world, and in particular for Orthodox Christians, the Holy Church of Agia Sophia has never ceased to be their, our holy place and the Mother Church of all Christian Churches.

Prime Minister Erdoğan, on May 29, 1453, the Ottoman political and military leaders of that time violently seized the Holy Church of Agia Sophia, killed the faithful who were praying inside, and beheaded their religious representatives.

Following its seizure, the Ottoman political and military leaders converted the Holy Church of Agia Sophia to a mosque, an action that symbolically reinforced the dominance of the ruling Ottoman Sultans, but one that blatantly violated the Islamic precept of respect for the Religions of the Book.

In the 20th century the Holy Church of Agia Sophia was converted into a so-called "museum," which to this day serves as an exhibition center for cheap artifacts, household consumer goods, musical concerts and fashion shows. In other words, Prime Minister Erdogan, today, the Holy Church of Agia Sophia serves as an international tourist and trade attraction and a senseless bazaar site for the promotion of material goods, concerts and street vendor artifact sales, trampling on the sensibilities of the faithful.

Mister Prime Minister, the International Congregation of the Holy Church of Agia Sophia, and the thousands who are its members throughout the world, believe that no government should

participate in or condone actions which abuse, demean, or violate religious beliefs, or deface holy figures.

No government, Mr. Prime Minister, in the 21st century should dare to believe that it has the power to interfere with religion, to anoint priests and to appoint religious leaders. And no government should interfere with the free expression of religious beliefs, intimidate or deprive the faithful of any religion of the right to individual or collective prayer.

And most certainly, Prime Minister Erdoğan, no government has the right or should have the right to deny the faithful of the religious use of such a long-established Holy site, as the Great Church of Agia Sophia. George W. Bush, the former President of the United States, put it succinctly when in February 2001 he declared: "The days of discrimination against religious institutions simply because they are religious, must come to an end."

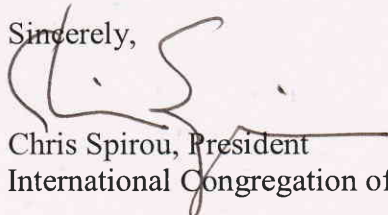
Prime Minister Erdoğan, we look forward to having you join us on September 17, 2010, when we gather in Holy Prayer in the Holy Church of Agia Sophia. Together on that day, September 17, 2010, we can put an end to years of anti-religious practices, which are in violation of the fundamental laws of nature and civilization. Practices which offend United Nations and Council of Europe Treaties and Resolutions on Human Rights and Religious Freedoms to which your State is a party, and are contrary to the Acquis Communautaire of the European Union, of which your State aspires to become a part.

The world watches as you personally endeavor to bring democracy and social justice to your country. Joining us in the Holy Church of Agia Sophia, on Friday, September 17, 2010 will fully justify the European Union's designation of the historic City of Istanbul as the Cultural Capital of Europe for 2010.

Finally, Prime Minister Erdoğan, it is our intent formally to petition the new leaderships of the European Commission and the European Parliament, when they begin their tenure, to designate the "Pilgrimage to the Holy Church of Agia Sophia 2010" as an integral part of the festivities celebrating Istanbul as "City: Cultural Capital of Europe 2010."

We count on your understanding of the power of faith as well as on your commitment to basic human rights and the free expression, and look forward to your support.

Sincerely,



Chris Spirou, President
International Congregation of Agia Sophia

Cc: -H. E Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations
-H.E José Manuel Durão Barroso, President of the European Commission
-H.E Samuel Žbogar, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe
-H.E. Hillary Rodham Clinton, United States Secretary of State
-H.E. Nabi Sensoy, Turkish Ambassador to the United States
-H.E Oguz Celikkol, Turkish Ambassador to Greece

Via Overnight Express, Email and Fax.