

Mufti Tajuddin proposes making Hagia Sophia common prayer-house for Muslims and Christians



The Supreme Mufti of the Central Spiritual Muslim Board of Russia, Talgat Tajuddin, has proposed that the Cathedral of Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) in Istanbul be made a common place of worship for Christians and Muslims.

“It can be opened for Muslims and for Christians alike. Because there is but one God, and this structure was built to worship God,” Tajuddin told *Interfax*, commenting on the ruling of the Turkish Supreme Court allowing Hagia Sophia’s museum status to be changed by presidential decree.

One side of the cathedral could be for Muslims, another for the Orthodox, with tourists walking in between; Muslims would pray on Friday, the Orthodox on Sunday, the Russian mufti said. “To some this might seem a blasphemy, but I think it is possible. This is how I understand the Koran and the professions of the Prophet about faith being meant to bring people closer,” Tajuddin said.

Furthermore, in the event of a renewal of religious services in Hagia Sophia, the cathedral will start fulfilling its true mission, he said, recounting how he was once accosted by police officers when he decided to pray on a visit to the cathedral.

Concurrently, Tajuddin recalled that there are many Orthodox Christians in Turkey and the authorities “would be very wise” to allow them to pray in the cathedral of Hagia Sophia.

Finally, if Hagia Sophia is made a common prayer-house for different religions, this will be a “worthy answer of the humankind to the challenges of the pandemic,” the mufti said.

“Before the epidemic began, it got to a point where everyone was waiting for a Third World War, all international treaties had been flouted. And all of a sudden, through this coronavirus, God has reminded who is the Lord here. So, temples must bring [people] closer, then there would be no virus and no pandemic, because the main aim of all the messengers of God was to bring people closer,” the spiritual leader said.

The debate around the future of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul reignited after the cathedral held a reading of the Koran on May 29, the anniversary of the fall of Constantinople. The following week Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan ordered to examine a possibility of turning Hagia Sophia into a mosque. Later Justice Minister Abgulhamit Gul spoke in favor of the cathedral becoming a mosque again, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavosoglu concurred with him. For his part, Armenian Patriarch Sahak II of Turkey suggested that the cathedral should become a place of worship for Christians and for Muslims. Representatives of the Orthodox Churches and high-ranking diplomats, including the United States’ Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, opposed the idea of turning Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

The cathedral was granted the museum status in 1934 by first Turkish president Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Since 1985 the cathedral has been on the UNESCO World Heritage list. On Thursday the Turkish Supreme Court ruled that the status of the cathedral may be reviewed by presidential decree. The matter was considered also by the Turkish Council of State, which will publish its conclusion over the next 15 days.

[Source](#)