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Statement of His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III on the status of Hagia Sophia shrine

On Wednesday, June 25/July 8, 2020, H.H.B. Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos stated the following regarding the keeping of the Status of the Church of Hagia Sophia:

It is with utmost seriousness that We express Our concern over recent calls from members of the Turkish government to alter the current status of the Hagia Sophia from a museum to a mosque.

This magnificent Byzantine Church structure, which captivates the world until today, has a history stretching even farther back into Christendom than the 6th century. Over the course of generations, the region and its people have passed through challenging times that have left painful memories. However, it has been to Turkey's credit that for nearly 100 years it has administered the Hagia Sophia as a museum in order to maintain an extent of neutrality over the site. Subsequently, people from all over the world and from every background are able to enjoy its spiritual, architectural, and historical splendor.

Furthermore, museum status, i.e. indiscriminate accessibility, to Hagia Sophia has born fruit where there otherwise could have been further contention. Hagia Sophia today remains a symbol of tolerance. Some may find spiritual refreshment within its boundaries, others may be inspired by its testament to human accomplishment, and others may view it through individual prisms of meaning. However, this array of outcomes does the best possible justice to the site, which without question was always intended to inspire awe and to glorify Almighty God.

As stewards of sacred heritage in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, for nearly 2,000 uninterrupted years, in a land over which three Abrahamic faiths lay equal claim, We strongly attest to the fact that accessibility promotes peace and mutual respect, whereas attitudes of exclusivity promote conflict and bitterness. We hope and pray, for the benefit of all people of good will, and for Turkey as a nation with the potential to influence our entire region down a path of growth and mutual co-existence, that the present status of the Hagia Sophia is respected and preserved.

THEOPHILOS III

PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

From Secretariat-General

Source