

## **Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Sweden issues statement regarding the preservation of the status of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul**



The Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Sweden and All Scandinavia expresses its grave concern regarding the preservation of the status of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul – an UNESCO world heritage site – following a decision by the Turkish Council of State on July 2, 2020 regarding this 1,500-year-old structure. The ruling opened the way for the Hagia Sophia's conversion into a mosque on July 24 – an action being pursued by the current Turkish Government. We believe that such an action would directly challenge religious freedom in Turkey, spark unnecessary controversy that will threaten interreligious rapprochement and dialogue worldwide, and endanger the cultural legacy of this worldwide treasure, including its recently uncovered mosaics and iconography.

The Hagia Sophia was originally built to function as a church, during the 6th century AD, and served as Christianity's foremost place of worship for almost a

millennium. Following the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans in 1453, it was converted into a mosque. Not long after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, it rightly became a museum in 1935 – serving as a universal monument celebrating the coexistence of cultures and a living symbol of respect for all faiths. The recent decision to convert it into a mosque would be a major sign of disrespect to Christians worldwide, harming Turkey's image and going against the guiding principles to which the Turkish Republic has adhered for nearly a century.

In its current status as a museum, the Hagia Sophia brings together people and cultures from all over the world. A change in this status would undoubtedly diminish this remarkable structure's legacy as a universally accessible bridge uniting East and West, symbolizing the peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding, and solidarity between diverse peoples.

We echo the words of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew that “we consider it inappropriate and harmful, in the 21st century, for Hagia Sophia, which is dedicated to God's Holy Wisdom and enables the faithful of both religions to meet and marvel at its grandeur, to become the cause of confrontations and conflicts.” In the spirit of Hagia Sophia's name, which literally translates to Holy Wisdom, we pray that wisdom and reason will ultimately prevail and Hagia Sophia will continue to operate under its current status.

[Source](#)