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## **Church bells in Cyprus tolled for five minutes as prayers held at Hagia Sophia**



Church bells in Cyprus tolled in a funereal tone for five minutes on Friday at noon to mark the conversion of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul into a mosque while the government, parties and groups condemned the Turkish move.

The first prayers after the recent decision to turn the centuries-old monument into a mosque were held on Friday in the presence of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Cypriot Archbishopric said in a statement that church bells all over Cyprus would toll for five minutes “in view of the arbitrary, unacceptable and criminal conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque by the Turks.”

The same move took place in Greece in addition to all flags flying half-mast.

“Hagia Sophia is an ecumenical monument with a huge history, whose character is now being altered by the Turkish President in order to serve petty political games,” President Nicos Anastasiades said on Friday.

The transformation of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, he said, is a direct insult to the world cultural heritage and the international institutions that represent it.

“It offends the historical memory, undermines European values and disrespects the religious sentiment of Christians, Orthodox and non-Christians throughout the world,” he said.

Most political parties issued damning statements against Turkey’s lack of respect for other cultures, its intransigence and provocative stance and called for sanctions on Ankara from the EU and international community.

Social media was inundated with posts on Hagia Sophia with slogans about Hellenism, Christianity, and Turkey’s vain attempts to claim as her own one of the most important and symbolic Christian Orthodox monuments.

One of the most popular posts widely shared is one thanking Erdogan for showing the world Hagia Sophia’s importance and Christianity’s strength since he and the Turkish people will hold their prayers in a Christian church which they have been illegally possessing.

Turkey’s decision unleashed a torrent of criticism from church leaders, who said the conversion to exclusively Muslim worship risked deepening religious divisions. Turkey says the site will remain open for visitors and its Christian artworks will be protected.

The Christian frescoes and mosaics adorning the dome and central hall of Hagia Sophia, a Christian Byzantine cathedral for 900 years before it was seized by Ottoman conquerors and served as a mosque until 1934, will be concealed by curtains during Muslim prayer times but remain on display for the rest of the time.

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[Source](#)