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INTERPARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY ON ORTHODOXY CALLS ON UN AND UNESCO TO PROTECT ARMENIAN CHURCHES IN AZERBAIJAN



The Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO) issued a statement on March 17, calling on international organizations to protect the monuments of Armenian culture that are now within the territory of Azerbaijan, including sites of the Armenian Apostolic church.

The IAO comprises parliamentary delegations from 25 countries (including Greece, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, and many other Orthodox countries) with an aim to coordinate legislation and encourage the adoption of laws in the

interests of Orthodoxy in countries where it is a fundamental cultural and ethnic factor, and to promote communication between the Churches.

Dr. Maximos Charakopoulos, member of the Greek Parliament and Secretary General of the IAO, opened his statement on behalf of the IAO on the protection of Christian Monuments in Nagorno-Karabakh emphasizing that the Assembly “has repeatedly declared the need to safeguard the monuments of world civilization, in the face of decisions and actions that threaten them with destruction or alteration of their character.”

While the modern world largely “understands and respects the enormous historical and spiritual value of monuments,” there continue to be incidents that violate these principles, Dr. Charakaopoulos said, pointing to the recent re-conversion of Agia Sophia in Istanbul into a mosque. He also pointed to incidents in Kosovo, Syria, Iraq, and Turkish-occupied Cyprus, where monuments were completely destroyed.

“Based on the aforementioned, being representatives of the parliaments of many countries, we deem it necessary every time to express our categorical disagreement to such practices and to call on international organizations and governments to not allow them to take place,” the Secretary General underlines.

In view of this general stance, the IAO therefore particularly draws attention to the situation in the aftermath of the bloody war in Nagorno-Karabakh, where “cultural treasures of great religious, historical and artistic value for the ecumenical culture, the Armenian people and the Apostolic Christian Church, now under the administration of Azerbaijan.”

These monuments are in need of immediate protection, the IAO believes, and thus it “call[s] on the UN and UNESCO to contribute to the protection of the cultural wealth and monuments of the Armenian people, now under the administration of Azerbaijan and not to allow changes in their use or destruction.”

“Any dereliction of duty or lack of interest can cause irreparable damage to monuments belonging to all mankind,” Dr. Charakopoulos concludes.

Note that the Armenian Apostolic church is not part of the Orthodox Church, though the Armenian people have historical ties with Georgia and Russia.

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