

US supports the reopening of the Theological School of Halki, says US ambassador for religious affairs Sam Brownback



There are no excuses for the non-reopening of the Theological School of Halki said the United States ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, Sam Brownback in an interview with the Athens-Macedonian News Agency (ANA) on Sunday.

The US diplomat touched on a number of topics relating to religious affairs relating to Greece, including the reopening of the Halki Theological Seminary, the all-male monastic community on Mount Athos and the state of religious freedom in Greece.

Regarding the reopening of the Halki seminary, he said the US supports this and underlined that there was “really no excuse” why this had not happened already.

“We support the re-opening of Halki and have for some period of time. It needs to be re-opened and it should have happened many years ago. And it’s really time for the Turkish government to allow this to happen. There are really no excuses for why this should not happen. And on the scale of issues of religious freedom, this is an important one. This is about training the future generation of Orthodox priests in a very mainline school that has been closed. It really is time for the Turkish government to open this university, allow it to be opened back up.”

Asked about his visit to Mount Athos, Brownback said it was his first time “and I can see why people go.”

“It is a special place. The history of it, the artifacts that I saw... the amazing things that you see, the icons. I had a very good trip there. What was interesting and intriguing to me was the importance of Mount Athos to the entire Christian world and particularly the Orthodox world. It is a pretty remote place, it is hard to get to, but out of it emanates so much of the spirituality for Orthodoxy. It is a special place. I have not been to a place like it anywhere else in the world,” he said.

He praised the state of religious freedom in Greece, describing it as “excellent” and noted that people were free to practice what they choose to, here, when they choose to practice or no practice at all.

“They are really very good, quite a model for religious freedom. The outcome of the meetings really is an effort on our part to establish a lot more connection to the Orthodox Christian world. We have an ambassador that is connected to the Vatican for Catholicism, but we don’t have a real point of contact on the Orthodox world,” he added.

Brownback also commented on the Orthodox Ukrainian Church and the US position on this:

“We believe that the Church has the right to choose its own leadership, along their own traditions and decisions. The Ukrainian people have decided they want to have an Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has decided and agreed with that, and granted the Autocephaly. That should be the decision then and shouldn’t have an interference from an outside government saying that they should have to go another way. So we support the Church’s decision, how it chooses its own leadership and that should really be the end of the story.”

— Source: [ANA-MPA](#)