



## Order of Saint Andrew Laments Decision to Transform Hagia Sophia into a Mosque

The Order of Saint Andrew, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, notes with great sorrow Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's signing Friday of a decree that converts Hagia Sophia, the foremost Christian Cathedral in the entire world for nearly a millennium, into a mosque.

Amid the pain and grief of this day, we take comfort from Almighty God, aware that the light of Hagia Sophia continues to shine in Orthodox Christian churches throughout the world, and cannot be extinguished, and that the voices of praise for our Lord Jesus Christ that once resounded there still proclaim our Orthodox Faith all over the globe. In whatever guise, Hagia Sophia still stands as a beacon of light, a monument of faith and of the power of God in the hearts of human beings.

At the same time, we call upon international bodies and the governments of the world to recognize that this unwise decision casts a shadow over the commitment of the government of Turkey to religious tolerance and religious freedom. Hagia Sophia, as the foremost Cathedral in the Christian world for so many centuries, continues to be a source of inspiration for billions of Christians and people of other faith traditions worldwide. To claim it as the property of one faith group alone is to deny its longstanding status as a living symbol of respect for all faiths and a part of our collective heritage.

The Turkish government's decision today was not a courageous act, but a deeply ill-advised act of memoricide that ignores Turkey's rich Christian history and further threatens the religious freedom of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the remaining Christians of that land. It was undertaken in defiance of the United States, Russia, France, Greece and many others.

We urgently hope that if this decision is not rescinded, that it will be implemented in a manner that continues to acknowledge and respect Hagia Sophia's thousand years as a center of Christian prayer and worship.

In advocacy of religious freedom,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anthony J. Limberakis, MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Anthony J. Limberakis, MD

*Archon Aktouarios*