



ROBERT WEXLER

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

May 16, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush
The President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear President Bush:

I want to bring to your attention the following letter that was recently sent to the Prime Minister of Turkey Tayyip Erdogan by members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. The fact that this letter is initiated by the Chairman and Ranking Republican, Tom Lantos and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen respectively, signed by 42 of the 50 members of the Committee, by far a record number in anyone's memory, is an indication of how important to that Committee and Congress is the "religious freedom" of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Turkey.

It is my sincere hope that through your contact as well as that of your Administration with officials of Turkey will help Prime Minister Erdogan as well as the Turkish public fully understand the importance of the Ecumenical Patriarch to our government and to millions of Americans. Further, as an ally and friend of Turkey, we have an obligation to explain why it is in the interest of Turkey to guarantee unequivocally "religious freedom" to the spiritual head of the second largest Christian Church in the world. Ensuring religious freedom is essential to Turkey's accession to the European Union and to its growth as a democratic nation that fully respects human rights.

As the Member of Congress charged by my colleagues in the House of Representatives with overseeing American's relationship with Turkey, as Chairman of the Europe Subcommittee and as Co-Chair of the Turkey Caucus, I will be doing what I can to address this issue. You can rest assured that in my travels to Turkey and in my contacts with Turkish officials, I will strongly emphasize the above-mentioned points.

President Bush, I strongly believe that proper handling of this issue by you and your Administration in conjunction with the government of Turkey can only serve to strengthen our two nations' long-term bilateral relationship.

Sincerely,

Robert Wexler

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May 11, 2007

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His Excellency Recep Tayyip Erdogan
Prime Minister
Ankara
REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

Millions of Orthodox Christians in the United States, and 250 million around the world, are facing the likely elimination of their nearly 2,000-year-old spiritual beacon, the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In our view, this lamentable situation is the result of certain inappropriate practices of the Turkish Government, particularly as they are implemented in an era when the population of Turkish citizens who are Greek Orthodox has shrunk to near-negligible numbers.

We are especially concerned about three aspects of Turkish Government policy toward its citizens who are Greek Orthodox – practices which threaten the viability of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in a direct and urgent manner. The first of these is your longstanding unwillingness to recognize the Ecumenical Patriarchate as ecumenical – that is, trans-national. As you surely know, the entire world outside of Turkey, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, recognizes the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul as the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Its Ecumenical nature derives from its history and spiritual stature as well the faith and perceptions of people around the globe. We would hope that you would view the Ecumenical Patriarchate as part of the rich cultural tapestry of your magnificent, vibrant city.

Second, we are deeply concerned by your continued involvement in the process of selecting the Ecumenical Patriarch and by your continued insistence that he be a Turkish citizen. These practices clearly reflect your policy of viewing the Ecumenical Patriarchate as a strictly Turkish institution, when, in fact, it provides spiritual and moral guidance for millions of believers worldwide. Today there are less than 2,500 Greek

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Orthodox citizens of Turkey, most of whom are elderly. Accordingly, under present policies, there soon will be virtually no Greek Orthodox citizens of Turkey left to qualify as Ecumenical Patriarch.

Third, your expropriations of lands belonging to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as a result of a policy in which the state takes possession of lands not being directly used by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and of lands of those who emigrated or died without heirs, is very worrisome to us. This policy deprives the Ecumenical Patriarchate of both badly needed funds and cultural patrimony.

All Americans and all seekers of peace highly value Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's accomplishments. As you surely know, the U.S. Congress has bestowed on His All Holiness America's highest honor, the Congressional Gold Medal, and it did so with the largest number of cosponsors on record at that time.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate – the Sacred See, which has survived since its establishment by the Apostle Andrew nearly two thousand years ago – will disappear in the foreseeable future, unless Turkey changes its policies. We urge you, in friendship and respect, to do everything possible to preserve the Ecumenical Patriarchate and to end all restrictions on its religious freedom.

Sincerely,



TOM LANTOS
Chairman



ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Ranking Republican Member



HOWARD L. BERMAN



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH



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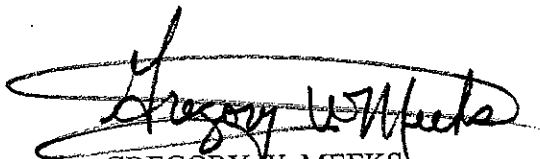

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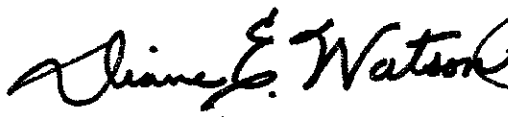

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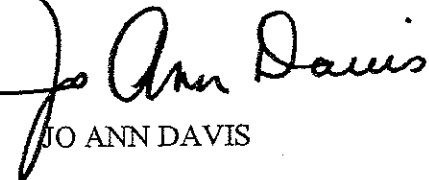

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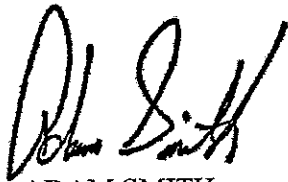

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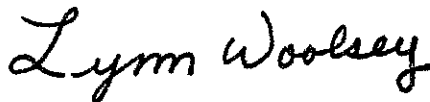
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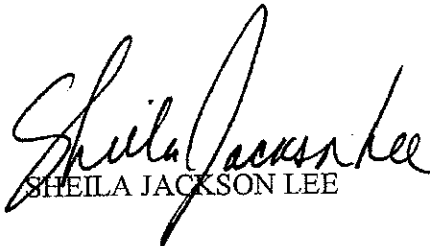
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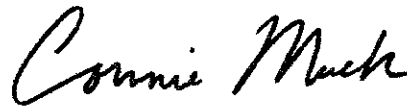
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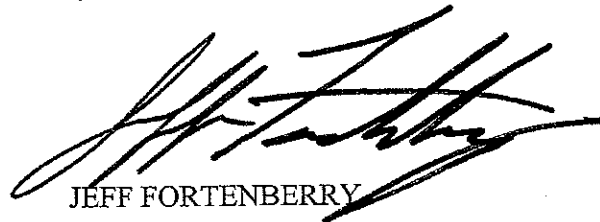
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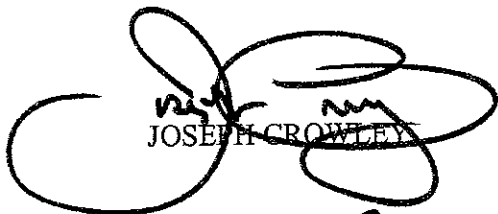
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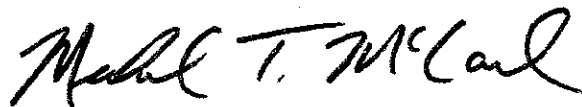
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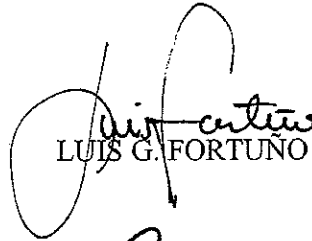
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