

State of Vermont

Senate Chamber



Montpelier, Vermont

Joint Senate Resolution

By Senators Sears and Hartwell,

J.R.S. 47. Joint resolution strongly urging the Republic of Turkey to recognize the right to religious freedom for all its residents and to end all discriminatory policies directed against the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church.

Whereas, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew is the spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians, is the 269th direct successor of the Apostle Andrew, and heads the second largest church in Christianity, and

Whereas, in the 6th century, the undivided Christian Church bestowed the titles Ecumenical Patriarch and Ecumenical Patriarchate on the Patriarch of Constantinople, and these titles are exclusively spiritual and were never intended to confer any political or secular governance rights in the city of Constantinople (now Istanbul) on the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and

Whereas, since the formation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, that nation has repeatedly and illegally adopted repressive discriminatory policies against the Ecumenical Patriarchate, including its conduct of religious governance, operation of institutions such as schools and orphanages, and ownership of property, and

Whereas, in 1923, and again in 1970, the Republic of Turkey imposed severe limitations on the fundamental spiritual existence and continuance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, requiring that both the individual elected to this office, and the Hierarchs (the Metropolitans and Archbishops who elect him) be Turkish citizens, and

Whereas, only 15 of the 40 Hierarchs worldwide in Christian Orthodoxy reside in Turkey, and only two deacons and two priests now working for the Ecumenical Patriarchate are in a position to replace the Hierarchs in the future, and

Whereas, not only is the election of the Ecumenical Patriarch an exclusively spiritual matter that should be totally outside the authority of the Republic of Turkey, but the majority of Orthodox Christians and their religious leaders reside outside Turkey, and

Whereas, the Ecumenical Patriarchate is the first church of Orthodox Christianity worldwide, not just in Turkey, is responsible for worldwide coordination of pan-Orthodox Christian affairs, and serves as the spiritual center for 300 million Orthodox Christians, and

Whereas, in 1971, the government of the Republic of Turkey illegally closed the Theological School of Halki, and

Whereas, the Treaty of Lausanne, signed in 1923, was intended to assure the rights of minorities in Turkey, but the Ecumenical Patriarchate, even though it has existed in Turkey for 1,700 years, lacks any legal status, and

Whereas, a direct corollary of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's lack of legal status in Turkey is a governmental prohibition on its owning property, forcing the creation of an independent minority foundation to own and manage church-related buildings that in normal circumstances would be church-owned, and

Whereas, even with this substitute ownership system, the government confiscation of church-related properties is continuing, and

Whereas, a proposed new law on minority foundations' property rights has involved great secrecy and greatly concerns the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and

Whereas, even the ownership of churches has now been threatened because there are insufficient numbers of church members residing in the immediate area of a church, and

Whereas, the Republic of Turkey's refusal to grant work permits to foreigners has greatly impeded the daily activities of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, forcing clergy and lay individuals to leave the country regularly and reapply for admission, and

Whereas, in 2005, a panel of leading Christian and Jewish clergy testified before the congressional Helsinki Commission on the threat to Orthodox Christianity because of the Republic of Turkey's denial of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's basic human rights, and

Whereas, a record number of cosponsors supported the awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, an award which has a distinguished historic recipient list, and

Whereas, the Republic of Turkey is seeking admission to the European Union, and refusing to grant human and legal rights to the Ecumenical Patriarchate is contrary to the EU-Turkey 2003 Accession Partnership, *now therefore be it*

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly strongly urges the Republic of Turkey to recognize the right to religious freedom for all its residents and to end all discriminatory policies directed against the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church, *and be it further*

Resolved: That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Washington, D.C., the Order of Saint Andrew the Apostle Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in New York City, and the Vermont congressional delegation.

President of the Senate

Attested to:

Speaker of the House

David A. Gibson
Secretary of the Senate

Date:_____