Ambassador Namik Tan  
Embassy of Turkey  
2525 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Ambassador Tan:

We write to you to express our profound concern that the policies of the Turkish government pose a grave threat to the future of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the spiritual home of the world’s second largest Christian Church.

The Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul is the spiritual head of approximately 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide and the 269th direct descendant of the Apostle Andrew. Nearly ninety-four percent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s properties have already been confiscated by the Turkish government.

In 2008, the European Court of Human Rights, in a unanimous 7-0 decision, condemned the Turkish government’s illegal taking of the Patriarchal Orphanage. The Turkish government, which is a signatory to the treaty creating this Court, has so far not complied with the Court’s ruling.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate’s extinction in the coming years is essentially inevitable if Turkey continues its policy of prohibiting any of the 300 million non-Turkish Orthodox Christians from becoming the Ecumenical Patriarch. Turkey itself has only about 2,500 remaining eligible Orthodox Christians, and they are a mostly elderly community.

Millions of Orthodox Christian Americans — including those of us in Connecticut — stand to lose their spiritual head, and all Christians will give up a crucial link to their history and forefathers. Within the 2,000 year old Sacred See, the text of the New Testament was codified, the canonical structure of the Christian Church was established, and the Nicene Creed was created.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew’s individual importance to America is reflected in the record number of Congressional cosponsors who bestowed on him our country’s highest honor, the Congressional Gold Medal, an award also given to George Washington, Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela and Pope John Paul II. His importance on the world stage in connection with spiritual and environmental issues was also highlighted in a recent segment of 60 Minutes.
During the past several years, numerous representatives of the United States government have urged Turkey to discontinue its policies which threaten the continued existence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Among other things, Presidents George H.W. Bush, William J. Clinton, George W. Bush and the current President, Barack Obama, have all called on Turkey to re-open the Halki Theological School, which the government closed in 1971. This was the only Orthodox Christian theological school in the country for the training of its clergy. Twenty-eight religious freedom resolutions in support of the Ecumenical Patriarchate have been adopted in twenty-four state legislatures in the United States, urging the Turkish government to, among other things, (i) cease its discrimination of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, (ii) grant the Ecumenical Patriarchate international recognition, ecclesiastic succession, and the right to train its clergy, (iii) respect the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s property rights and (iv) re-open the Halki Theological School.

We, the undersigned support, these resolutions and share their concern for the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and respectfully request that you communicate these concerns to the leaders of the Turkish government urging them to discontinue those policies which threaten the future existence of the Patriarchate.

Sincerely,

Themis Klarides
Deputy House Republican Leader

Demetrios S. Giannaras
Assistant Deputy Speaker for Economic Affairs

Christopher G. Donovan
Speaker of the House

Denise W. Merrill
House Majority Leader

Lawrence F. Cafero, Jr.
House Republican Leader

John C. Geragosian
Appropriations Committee Chairman
Vincent J. Candelora  
State Representative

DebraLee Hovey  
Assistant House Minority Leader

Lawrence G. Miller  
State Representative

T.R. Rowe  
State Representative

Selim G. Noujaim  
Assistant House Minority Leader

David A. Scribner  
Assistant House Minority Leader

Toni  
Assistant Senate Minority Leader

Scott Frantz  
State Senator

Rob Kane  
Deputy Senate Minority Leader

Christopher D. Coutu  
State Representative

David K. Labriola  
Assistant House Minority Leader

Selim G. Noujaim  
Assistant House Minority Leader

David A. Scribner  
Assistant House Minority Leader

Toni Boucher  
Assistant Senate Minority Leader

Tony Guglielmo  
Chief Deputy Senate Minority Leader

Michael A. McLachlan  
Senate Minority Whip
John W. Hetherington  
Assistant Minority Leader

Tim LeGeyt  
State Representative

Arthur O'Neil  
Assistant Minority Leader

John Piscopo  
Minority Whip

John Rigby  
State Representative

Sean Williams  
State Representative

Tony Hwang  
State Representative

Craig Minor  
Assistant Minority Leader

Jason Perillo  
State Representative

Rosa Rebimbas  
State Representative

Pamela Sawyer  
Minority Whip

Terrie Wood  
State Representative
Emil "Buddy" Altobello  
Deputy Speaker of the House

Joe Aresimowicz  
Assistant House Majority Leader

David Baram  
State Representative

Juan Candelaria  
Deputy House Majority Whip

Charles Clemons  
Deputy House Majority Whip at Large

Henry Genga  
Assistant House Majority Leader

Bob Godfrey  
Deputy Speaker of the House

Antonio Guerra  
Chair Transportation Committee

Ernest Hewett  
Deputy House Majority Leader

Matthew Lesser  
State Representative

Patricia Miller  
State Representative

Ted Moukawsher  
Assistant House Majority Leader

Tim O'Brien  
Assistant House Majority Leader

J. Brendan Sharkey  
Chair Planning and Development Committee

Patricia Widlitz  
Deputy House Majority Leader

Steven Mikutel  
House Majority Whip at Large
David Aladondo
Assistant House Majority Leader

Beth Bye
Vice-Chair Aging Committee

Stephen Dargan
Chair Public Safety and Security Committee

Kim Fawcett
State Representative

Bryan Hurlbut
Vice-Chair Environment Committee

Ed Jutila
Assistant House Majority Leader

Tom Kehoe
Vice-Chair Transportation Committee

Mary Kirkley Bay
Deputy Speaker of the House

Timothy Larson
State Representative

Mike Lawlor
Chair Judiciary Committee

Douglas McCrory
Assistant House Majority Leader

Mary Mushinsky
Chair Program Review and Investigations Committee

Joseph Mioli
Assistant House Majority Leader

Frank Nicastro
Vice-Chair Veterans' Affairs Committee

Peggy Reeves
State Representative

Linda Schofield
Vice-Chair Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee

Peter Villano
Deputy House Majority Whip at Large
Jason Bartlett
Vice Chair Appropriations Committee

Claire Janowski
Chair Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee

Paul Davis
Assistant House Majority Leader

Bruce Morris
Assistant House Majority Leader

James O'Rourke
Deputy Speaker of the House

John Mazurek
Assistant House Majority Whip

Brian O'Connor
State Representative

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Deputy Senate Majority Leader

Lonnie Reed
State Representative

Joseph Criscen
Deputy Senate Caucus Leader

James Spallone
Chair Government Administration and Elections Committee

Donald DeFronzo
Assistant President Pro Tempore

Kathleen Tallarita
House Majority Caucus Chair

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Assistant Senate Majority Leader
Betty Boulus  
Deputy House Majority Whip

Thomas Drew  
Vice-Chair Planning and Development Committee

Andrew Fleischmann  
Chair Education Committee

Linda Gentile  
Assistant House Majority Leader

Audra Grogins  
State Representative

Deborah Heinrich  
Vice-Chair Appropriations Committee

Carlo Leone  
Deputy House Majority Whip

Christopher Lyddy  
State Representative

Hector Robles  
State Representative

Richard Roy  
Chair Environment Committee

Jeffrey J. Berger  
Chair Commerce Committee

Ezequiel Santiago  
State Representative

Jim Shapiro  
Chair General Law Committee

Joseph Taforsak  
State Representative

William Tong  
Vice-Chair Energy and Technology Committee
Peter Tercyak
Deputy House Majority Leader

Christopher Wright
State Representative

Kevin Ryan
Chair Labor and Public Employees Committee

Diana Urban
Chair, Children's Committee

Betsy Ritter
Chair Public Health Committee

Jack Thompson
Assistant House Majority Whip

Toni Walker
Chair Human Services Committee

Joe Serra
Chair Aging Committee

Zeke Zalaski
Assistant House Majority Whip

Andres Ayala
Vice Chair Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee

Louis Esposito, Jr.
Deputy House Majority Leader

Gail Hamm
Assistant House Majority Whip

Kelvin Roldán
Vice-Chair Appropriations Committee

Ted Graziani
Chair Veterans' Affairs Committee

Shawn Johnson
State Representative

Sandy Nafis
Deputy House Majority Leader
Leonard Pasano  
Senate Minority Leader Pro Tempore

Mary Ann Handley  
Chief Deputy Senate Majority Leader

Jonathan Harris  
Chief Assistant Senate Majority Leader

Andrew Maynard  
Senate Majority Whip

Edward Meyer  
Assistant Senate Majority Leader

Andrea Stillman  
Deputy Senate Majority Leader