



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Statement Concerning Agia Sophia

The Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy

Esteemed Members of the Metropolitan Council, Esteemed Members of the Parish Councils, Philoptochos Sisterhood, Faculty and Students of the Catechetical and Greek Afternoon Schools, Directors and Participants of all Youth Organizations, and all devout Orthodox Christians of the Communities of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved in the Lord,

Once again, the Turkish government has decided to ignore history and to threaten the Christian minority within Turkey by proposing that the Church of Agia Sophia be converted into a mosque. This most recent effort to turn the jewel of the Orthodox Church into something it was never intended to be can only be described as a deliberate act meant to intimidate the Christian minority in Turkey and, in particular, our Mother Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Such actions show that the Turkish government has no intention to remember the history of the native Greek people whose cultural heritage stretches back to the 4th century and their actions are an affront to all Orthodox Christians throughout the world. Instead, the Turkish government's actions demonstrate its desire to eradicate our faith and our history.

The Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey strongly and unequivocally condemns the statements and actions of Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has made this one of his central goals and it condemns any effort made to convert the venerable Church of Agia Sophia into a mosque. The Church of Agia Sophia must remain a Church, as it was intended, as it was built, as it was Consecrated, and as it was used for over 900 years. The despicable desire to change Agia Sophia from its original status as an Orthodox Church into a mosque is nothing short of religious persecution and cultural genocide against a community that has been persecuted for hundreds of years by the Turks.

My beloved in the Lord, our Orthodox Christian faith will not be extinguished by these hateful persons despite their efforts. Our Mother Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, will not be annihilated despite their centuries-long attempts to do so. Our people will not be intimidated by these malicious threats which aim to erase our faith, our history, and our culture. Instead, we must stand together as Orthodox Christians, condemn this indefensible proposal, and bring attention to this most important issue within our own Communities and throughout the world. We must protect our faith and proudly proclaim that Agia Sophia must be what it was always intended to be – a Church.

Let us always remember the words of Scripture when it is said, *“I said to myself, ‘God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed’”* (Eccl. 3:17). Praying that the Lord, who delivers justice in His own time, continues to guard and protect the Holy Church of Agia Sophia from every assault, I remain

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Metropolitan Evangelos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

† E V A N G E L O S
Metropolitan of New Jersey