



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

**Statement Concerning Agia Sophia
July 10, 2020**

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,

In what can only be described as an act of hatred, disdain, and malice towards the Orthodox faith, Byzantine culture, and Hellenic heritage, the government and courts of Turkey have given permission for the venerable and holy Church of Agia Sophia in Constantinople to be turned into a mosque. This vile and despicable decision not only offends Orthodox Christians, but all Christians throughout the world as the Turkish government seeks to eradicate Christianity.

The Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey strongly and unequivocally condemns this action, prompted and promoted by Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The inherent injustice that we have witnessed today is one felt across the globe by all people who treasure justice, peace, and cooperation. It is yet another action in Turkey's long history of systematic religious and cultural genocide which stretches back centuries and has become increasingly more radical these past decades. Just over a century ago, Turkey murdered millions of Christians in an effort to exterminate the Christian presence within its borders. In the past century, Turkey initiated several pogroms aimed at Greeks and other Christian groups which killed countless innocent people and drove millions to flee from their native homeland. Just over fifty years ago, Turkey initiated a ruthless war against Cyprus which has culminated in its illegal occupation. Above all, for centuries Turkey has persecuted and deprived the religious freedom of our most Holy Mother Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of

Constantinople. Now, Turkey seeks to desecrate the most sacred Church of Agia Sophia by converting it into something it was never intended to be. These malevolent actions, which have wrought division, war, genocide and religious oppression must end!

It has become abundantly clear and obvious that the government of Turkey does not want to cooperate or act in a civilized manner. The Turkish government will continue its unwarranted and wicked subjugation of its own Christian citizens and it will not stop until it has annihilated every Christian person, converted every Christian church, and rewritten history so as to eliminate any reference to the native population which graced that region and which gave birth to the City of Cities, Constantinople.

Therefore, it is our responsibility to call on the international community to take action against the continuous evils emanating from Turkey. It is our duty to defend our Mother Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and to ensure that Christians may freely worship without fear of violence. We must raise our voices and declare that we will not be silenced, we will not capitulate to tyranny, and we will not lose faith in our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ who is the Judge of all. Therefore, I strongly encourage each and every one of you to write to your local, state, and federal political representatives expressing to them the continued injustices perpetrated by the Turkish government and urging them to condemn these actions and to intervene so that justice may prevail.

It is my sincerest hope that you will fervently pray for our beloved Agia Sophia to once again serve as an Orthodox Christian Church in the future. Keep our beloved Mother Church in your prayers and remain faithful that, even in the bleakness of the current situation, God is with us. Praying that the Theotokos, the Protectress of the Queen City of Constantinople, blesses and is with you always, I remain

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Metropolitan Evagelos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M'.

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