



HAGIA SOPHIA SELECTED RESOURCES¹

A. Who Should I Contact (See Exhibit A Draft Letter & Exhibit B Talking Points)

- 1. Contact Your Congressman - U.S. House of Representatives:**
<https://www.house.gov/representatives>
- 2. Contact Your Senators - U.S. Senators:**
https://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm
- 3. Contact Your State Governor:** <https://www.nga.org/governors/addresses/>
(Governor's Media Contact Directory: [Governors' Media Contact Directory](#))
- 4. Contact Your Mayor – U.S. Conference of Mayors Directory:**
<https://www.usmayors.org/mayors/>
- 5. Contact Your Media – U.S. Media Directory by State:**
<https://www.einpresswire.com/world-media-directory/3/united-states>
- 6. Contact Your Radio Station: Directory of U.S. Radio Stations:**
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lists_of_radio_stations_in_the_United_States
- 7. Contact Your TV Station – FCC Directory of U.S. Television Stations:**
<https://www.fcc.gov/media/television/tv-query>
- 8. Contact Social Media:** <https://www.socialmedianews.com.au/social-media-directory/>

¹ We are not advocating for or against any of the positions taken by anyone in these resources, nor are we able to fully vet them or their information or assertions. The opinions in any articles, videos, podcasts, resources or Op Eds included in this non-exclusive listing are the opinions of their authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of anyone associated with the Stewardship Calling ministry. We have high confidence in your ability, as Socrates once said: "...**to discover the truth for yourself.**" This document will attempt to provide a few resources for those interested in learning more about Hagia Sophia, or addressing the issue of its conversion. It is impossible for this list to be exhaustive, and periodic attempts may be made to update it from time to time. If you have any suggestions that you have found helpful and legitimate, you may submit them for inclusion to Bill@stewardshipcalling.com. Special thanks to dear friends Art Dimopoulos (National Hellenic Society Executive Director) for Part A contacts and Dr. Victor Polizos (& Georgea & Dean Polizos) for assistance with the Exhibits.

B. Some Petitions To Take Action

- 1. American Center of Law and Justice Religious Freedom Petition:**
<https://aclj.org/persecuted-church/stop-turkey-from-turning-historic-christian-church-into-a-mosque>
- 2. World Hellenic Diaspora - Hellenic Cultural Center of the Southwest:**
<https://appeals.worldhellenicdiaspora.org/?fbclid=IwAR2R4E0kOLWm-668fH-h8zolodwE-ql-30lCxWFDabPdOrEGtZlZ2ScQ0Ns>
- 3. Hellenic American Leadership Council Petition:**
http://action.hellenicleaders.com/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=10215
- 4. Archon Petition:** <https://www.archons.org/-/hagia-sophia-petition> - You can sign the Order of Saint Andrew the Apostle, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, by replying to info@archons.org:
- 5. Petition asking UNESCO to save Hagia Sophia from being converted into mosque**
https://hellenicleaders.p2a.co/CzLeJm6?fbclid=IwAR1zSeqhU_d_iRqN8QiYUqqnsE19AcXiWWu4uBKHTLyJedascHA88oetocc
- 6. Stop the Hagia Sophia from becoming a mosque – Change.org:**
<https://www.change.org/p/united-nations-stop-the-hagia-sofia-from-becoming-a-mosque>
- 7. HAGIA SOPHIA-SIGN THE PETITION. STOP the desecration of the world's heritage:**
https://secure.avaaz.org/community_petitions/en/Members_of_the_US_Congress_United_Nations_European_Parliament_Please_STOP_the_desecration_of_Worlds_spiritual_heritage_H/
- 8. PETITION TO SAFEGUARD HAGIA SOPHIA AS WORLD HERITAGE – National Technical University of Athens:** <https://www.ntua.gr/en/news-en/item/1606-petition-to-safeguard-hagia-sophia-as-world-heritage-en>

C. Hagia Sophia Background Information

- 1. See Brief Hagia Sophia History Attached as Exhibit “C”**
- 2. Hagia Sophia description from Orthodoxwiki:**
[https://orthodoxwiki.org/Hagia_Sophia_\(Constantinople\)](https://orthodoxwiki.org/Hagia_Sophia_(Constantinople))

3. Hagia Sophia description from Wikipedia:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hagia_Sophia

4. Hagia Sophia description from Britannica encyclopedia

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hagia-Sophia>

D. Interesting Articles

- 1. “Hagia Sophia: Turning This Turkish Treasure Into A Mosque Is At Odds With Its Unesco Status.”** Beth Daley Editor and General Manager of *The Conversation* - July 29, 2020. <https://theconversation.com/hagia-sophia-turning-this-turkish-treasure-into-a-mosque-is-at-odds-with-its-unesco-status-143372>
- 2. Islamic Society of North America Condemns Turkey’s Conversion of Hagia Sophia:** by Paul Antonopoulos <https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/07/14/islamic-society-of-north-america-condemns-turkeys-conversion-of-hagia-sophia/>
- 3. A Fairly Comprehensive Collection of Articles Explaining Many Aspects of Hagia Sophia :** <https://hagiasophiaturkey.com/> provided by the Hagia Sophia Research Team that describes itself as a group of people who like to research Byzantine Heritage in Turkey by visiting and taking photos of the historical places. The team aims at providing both visual & documented source about Byzantine Heritage in Turkey and especially Istanbul and “isn’t interested in politics and doesn’t act for Turkish authorities.”
- 4. “A Monumental Struggle to Preserve Hagia Sophia”** by Fergus M. Bordewich – *Smithsonian Magazine* 2008 <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/a-monumental-struggle-to-preserve-hagia-sophia-92038218/>
- 5. Hagia Sophia History.com** <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-greece/hagia-sophia>
- 6. “A Christian Church and Turkey’s Denial of Heritage and History”** by Wesley Smith July 15, 2020: <https://aclj.org/persecuted-church/a-christian-church-and-turkeys-denial-of-heritage-and-history>
- 7. “The World Speaks Out in Opposition as Turkey Begins Conversion of Historic Hagia Sophia to a Muslim Mosque”** by Jordan Sekulow July 15, 2020 <https://aclj.org/persecuted-church/the-world-speaks-out-in-opposition-as-turkey-begins-conversion-of-historic-hagia-sophia-to-a-muslim-mosque>

8. **“Turkey’s Test of Civilization”** by Taner Akçam <https://ahvalnews.com/hagia-sophia/turkeys-test-civilization>
9. **“Greek Islamic leader (Khalil Jihad): It is clear from the name that Hagia Sophia is a church”** - <https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/07/11/greek-islamic-leader-it-is-clear-from-the-name-that-hagia-sophia-is-a-church/>
10. **The Fall of Constantinople: The dreadful day 29 May 1453** - <https://orthodoxtimes.com/the-fall-of-constantinople-the-dreadful-day-29-may-1453/>

E. Interesting Videos

1. **“Hagia Sophia”** - (A must see, fascinating and only 11 minute video explaining the unique beauty, history and architectural marvel of Hagia Sophia - a conversation with Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris dean of art and history at Khan Academy): <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/early-europe-and-colonial-americas/medieval-europe-islamic-world/v/hagia-sophia-istanbul>
2. **“Turkey Converts Iconic Hagia Sophia Into a Mosque”** July 12, 2020 Jay Sekulow Live interviews Dr. Anthony Limberakis representing the Order of St Andrew-Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrWuLKXY0lw&feature=youtu.be>
3. **United States Congresswoman Dina Titus Presenting a Resolution on the Floor of the House of Representatives condemning the conversion of Hagia Sophia:** July 23, 2020: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1316LN7eJWYMTMj55gB46c6q7c2A9rOKP/view>
4. **Day of mourning in the USA on 24 July – “Hagia Sophia remains unattached in our heart” (video) – Archbishop Elpidophoros** - <https://orthodoxtimes.com/day-of-mourning-in-the-usa-on-24-july-hagia-sophia-remains-unattached-in-our-heart-video/>
5. **Hagia Sophia & Religious Freedom: A Panel Discussion:** With Dr Aykan Erdemir (former member of Turkish parliament), Dr Elizabeth Prodromou (Tufts University), Endy Zemenides (Hellenic American Leadership Council) https://chicago.goarch.org/separate-but-united/metropolitans-videos/-/asset_publisher/58JBSwWOEg7p/content/hagia-sophia-religious-freedom-a-panel-discussion

F. Resources - Podcasts - Audio

- 1. August 13, 2020 Hagia Sophia Stewardship Calling Live on Ancient Faith Radio:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Archbishop Elpidophoros, Orthodox Church in America Chancellor Very Reverend Dr Alexander Rentel, and Antiochian Chancellor Very Reverend Thomas Zain: <https://stewardshipcalling.com/hagia-sophia/>
- 2. Metropolis of San Francisco- Hagia Sophia Extensive Resource Center:** <https://sanfran.goarch.org/pages/hagia-sophia>
- 3. Order of St Andrew The Apostle – Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in America:** <https://www.archons.org/>
- 4. “Hagia Sophia An Uncertain Future” – Fr. Tom Soroka and Deacon David-John Williams** discuss the current outlook on Hagia Sophia following the Turkish government's recent decision to convert the former cathedral into a mosque. https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/aftodaylive/hagia_sophia_an_uncertain_future
- 5. "Islam: Historical Encounters and Contemporary Realities:"** Tonight Fr. Tom Soroka and his guest Dr. Timothy Furnish discuss the topic https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/aftodaylive/islam_historical_encounters_and_contemporary_realities

G. Statements on The Conversion of Hagia Sophia and “OP ED” Pieces¹

- 1. “Would the Prophet Muhammad Convert Hagia Sophia? - Turkey’s Decision To Change The Former Cathedral Into A Mosque Flies Against The Pluralist Instincts Of Islam’s Founders. – New York Times Op Ed Writer Mustafa Akyol** <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/20/opinion/hagia-sophia-mosque.html?smid=fb-share>
- 2. UNESCO Statement On Conversion of Hagia Sophia - (July 10, 2020)** <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-statement-hagia-sophia-istanbul>
- 3. Joint Statement of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros and His Excellency Cardinal Timothy Michael Dolan, Catholic Archbishop of New York:** <https://orthodoxtimes.com/common-statement-of-archbishop-elpidophoros-and-the-catholic-archbishop-of-new-york-on-hagia-sophia/>

4. **International Council of Museums and International Council on Monuments and Sites Joint Statement on Hagia Sophia:**
<https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-and-icomos-joint-statement-%E2%80%A8on-hagia-sophia-istanbul-turkey/>
5. **Joint Statement Of Archbishop Mark Coleridge (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference) and His Eminence Archbishop Makarios Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church of Australia On Hagia Sophia:**
<https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/07/24/joint-statement-on-the-status-of-hagia-sophia-greek-orthodox-archdiocese-of-australia-australian-catholic-bishops-conference/>
6. **Joints Statement of The Right Reverend Peter Eaton, Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Southeast Florida and His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios on Hagia Sophia:** - <https://atlmeteropolis.org/news/joint-orthodox-episcopal-statement-on-hagia-sophia>
7. **Statement of Council of Bishops of the UOC of the USA: THE LEGACY OF HAGIA SOPHIA - A LEGACY FOR ALL CHRISTIANS**
https://uocofusa.org/news_200724_2
8. **Joint Statement of His Excellency Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone and His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos on Hagia Sophia:**
<https://sanfran.goarch.org/news/joint-statement-his-eminence-metropolitan-gerasimos-his-excellency-archbishop-salvatore-cordileone-on-hagia-sophia>
9. **AHI Urges President Trump to Act on Hagia Sophia -**
<https://www.aheworld.org/press-releases-1/2020/7/15/ahi-urges-president-trump-to-act-on-hagia-sophia>

EXHIBIT “A” SAMPLE GOVERNMENT / MEDIA OFFICIALS LETTER

Dear _____,

Do you believe in religious freedom? Do you believe in human rights? If you do, then you must join the global voices of outrage over the decision of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to convert the museum and Cathedral of Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

Hagia Sophia (the “Church of the Holy Wisdom”) has stood in Istanbul for over 1500 years. After the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, Sultan Mehmet II converted the church into a mosque but respected its religious significance by not destroying the unique iconography and religious symbols. In 1935 the leader of modern Turkey, Kemal Ataturk, converted it into a museum. In 1985, Hagia Sophia Cathedral became a UNESCO World Heritage Site of “outstanding universal value” to all people.

In converting this historic Cathedral and museum, President Erdogan ignored: (a) the condemnation of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom and the tenets of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) that hold Turkey accountable for acts that violate religious freedoms in his country; (b) the words of the Islamic Society of North America, saying “The conversion of Hagia Sophia will reopen the wounds of...Christian communities across sectarian bounds around the world”; (c) the requests of international allies, fellow Muslim brothers, and Christian minorities struggling to live a peaceful existence as Turkish citizens; and (d) the teachings of his own Islamic faith, that strongly prohibit the desecration of a place of worship of Christians, Jews and other faiths.

Instead, he has consistently instigated intolerance and assaults on Turkey’s Christian communities and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Christian church, including converting numerous previous Orthodox churches into mosques. Geopolitical and regional historians suggest this is a purposeful move by President Erdogan to galvanize his voting base, and politicize “religious freedom,” a right that should be afforded to all people. The years of empty promises to be a religiously tolerant society for all of Turkey’s minorities have instead resulted in more church confiscations and restrictions on religious minorities.

The Western Wall in Jerusalem is an integral part of the Jewish faith. St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome is an integral part of the Catholic faith. Similarly, Hagia Sophia will always be a global religious symbol and a central part of the Orthodox Christian faith practiced by over 300 million people. Religious freedom and human rights advocates should be outraged by these, and other, recent aggressive and inhumane actions.

I am asking for your help in reversing this intolerable decision by President Erdogan. Rather than promoting a most-favored nation trade status with Turkey, America should withhold all forms of assistance, and demand reversal of this blatant disregard of religious freedom and international laws and conventions, just as it did in 2018 with the pressure that secured the release of Pastor Andrew Brunson.

If you profess to be an advocate of religious freedom and human rights, you are called to use every tool at your disposal to seek a reversal of this tragic decision and to publicly speak out against it. President Erdogan, and others who attack religious freedom, must be shown that this illegal, improper and aggressive behavior cannot be tolerated.

Sincerely,

EXHIBIT “B” HAGIA SOPHIA TALKING POINTS WHEN SPEAKING WITH OFFICIALS

On July 24, 2020, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan converted the museum and former church of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, in spite of international condemnation. Below, please find brief background information related to this decision.

Timeline:

- **360:** Original structure of Hagia Sophia completed in Constantinople (now Istanbul); it serves as both an Orthodox Christian Cathedral and the headquarters of the Orthodox Christian Church.
- **537:** Following subsequent fires, Hagia Sophia is successfully rebuilt; this is the structure that is still standing today.
- **1453:** Converted from a cathedral to a mosque by Sultan Mehmet II, at the fall of the Byzantine Empire.
- **1935:** Converted to a museum by then-president of modern Turkey Kemal Ataturk, as part of his efforts to secularize Turkey.
- **1985:** Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site of “outstanding universal value” to all people.
- **2020:** Converted to a mosque by President Erdogan.

Why is Hagia Sophia important?

- **Hagia Sophia holds a tremendous amount of symbolism for the over 300 million Orthodox Christians around the world.**
 - Here are some helpful comparisons, when considering religious symbols of similar significance:
 - **The Western Wall in Jerusalem, as a symbol of the Jewish faith.**
 - **St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, as a symbol of the Catholic tradition.**
- **What we do in reaction to President Erdogan’s provocation sets a strong precedent for proponents of religious freedom and human rights around the world.**
 - **Religious freedom is a founding principle of the United States.**
 - **This principle is further protected throughout the world by the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights.**

This is a polarizing step on the part of the Turkish government. Why did President Erdogan decide to go through with it, and why now?

- **Geopolitical and regional historians suggest this is a purposeful move by President Erdogan to galvanize his base, and politicize “religious freedom,” a right that should be afforded to all people.**

- **President Erdogan has ignored the requests of international allies, fellow Muslim brothers, and Christian minorities struggling to live a peaceful existence as Turkish citizens. He has also ignored the teachings of his own Islamic faith, which strongly prohibit the desecration of a place of worship of Christians, Jews, and other faiths.**
 - **The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) decried the decision: “USCIRF condemns the unequivocal politicization of the Hagia Sophia, an architectural wonder that has for so long stood as a cherished testament to a complex history and rich diversity. Both Christians and Muslims alike ascribe great cultural and spiritual importance to the Hagia Sophia, whose universal value to humankind was reaffirmed with its inclusion in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage List in 1985.”**
 - **The Islamic Society of North America likewise criticized President Erdogan’s choice: “The conversion of Hagia Sophia will reopen the wounds of...Christian communities across sectarian bounds around the world.”**
- **Despite years of promising to defend a religiously tolerant society for all of Turkey’s minorities, more restrictions continue to be placed on these populations.**
 - **These actions are in direct violation of the tenets of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), which hold President Erdogan accountable for acts that violate religious freedoms in Turkey.**
 - **Rather, President Erdogan has tolerated and, at times, encouraged assaults on Turkey’s Christian communities.**

What should we expect of the United States and its elected officials?

- **As American citizens, we cannot tolerate this type of egregious behavior on the part of one of our NATO allies.**
- **The United States should consider withholding foreign assistance for such blatant disregard of international norms.**
- **American officials should publicly pressure Turkey to respect religious freedom.**
 - **In 2018, the Trump administration applied extensive pressure to secure the successful release of Pastor Andrew Brunson from his unjust imprisonment by Turkish officials, citing violations of universal religious freedom as their reasoning; these same violations are embodied in Turkey’s decision regarding Hagia Sophia.**

EXHIBIT “C” SHORT HISTORY OF HAGIA SOPHIA

On July 24, 2020, the great Eastern Orthodox Cathedral of Hagia Sophia, an international symbol in Istanbul, Turkey, was converted from a museum to a mosque. Hagia Sophia is a religious and cultural symbol, cherished by all faiths, and universally admired by historians, archeologists, and other professionals in a wide array of fields. The first version of the great cathedral was the plan of Emperor Constantine the Great as he presided over the new eastern capital of the Roman Empire: Constantinople. Although he did not live to see it completed, the cathedral was finally finished in 360 AD, during the rule of his son. It would become the site of the Patriarchate, serving as the administrative center of the Eastern Orthodox Church for the next 1100 years.

Following the fires that destroyed the first and second original churches, construction of the third and final version of the Cathedral was supervised by the visionary Emperor Justinian the Great in the 6th century. Defying all odds and known architectural technology of the time, a large dome would crown the structure, rising 182 feet from the ground without the support of large interior columns (this style would thus be replicated by many other religious groups from that date forward). Construction would take less than six years to complete (by comparison, St. Peter’s Basilica took 150 years to build).

Over time, large beautiful Christian mosaics would adorn its walls. The sanctuary could accommodate 18,000 worshipers on major feast days, and was the largest Christian church in the world for over 1000 years. Emperors and Patriarchs were crowned, royal weddings were performed, and foreign dignitaries were received under its magnificent dome. Ecumenical (universal) Councils, determining church beliefs and doctrine across the Christian world, were held in the Cathedral. In 988 AD, dignitaries from the Kievan Dynasty, in the early stages of the founding of Russia, were received in Hagia Sophia. Upon their return to Kiev, they subsequently convinced Emperor Vladimir to encourage the citizens of the Russian empire to be baptized in the Orthodox faith.

In the 11th century, the Christian church split, with Constantinople remaining the administrative center of the East (today’s Orthodox Church), and Rome becoming the administrative center of the West (today’s Catholic Church). Today, the Eastern Orthodox Church is the world’s second largest Christian denomination and Istanbul (formerly Constantinople) continues to serve as its headquarters. More specifically, 1.5 million American Orthodox Christians, and over 300 million people around the world, call the Patriarchate in Istanbul the spiritual “home” of their church.

In the 15th century, as Ottoman Turks conquered lands in Asia Minor and southeastern Europe, the size and influence of the Byzantine Empire shrank to an area consisting of lands surrounding the walled city of Constantinople. In 1453, Sultan Mehmet’s troops completed their conquest of the Byzantine Empire when they marched through the walls of the defeated capitol city. One of Mehmet’s first actions was to convert the Hagia Sophia into a mosque. The last Christian service was held on May 29, 1453; it was followed by the first Muslim service later that same day. Muslim services continued until 1935 when then-president of the new Republic of Turkey, Kamal Ataturk, closed the mosque and converted the building into a public museum as a sign of modern, Turkish secularism.

Since its conversion to a museum, archaeologists have been exposing and restoring the Cathedral’s priceless mosaics, some of them over 1100 years old. In 1985, the United Nations declared Hagia Sophia a UNESCO World Heritage Site of “outstanding universal value,” and it is estimated to receive around 3 million visitors a year.