



National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA

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Hon. Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

February 17, 2010

Dear Madam Secretary:

I am writing on behalf the 36 member communions of the National Council of Churches USA, whose members total 45 million Christians, to express my appreciation to you and the Department of State for your commitment to advocate for and protect oppressed minorities – including Christian minorities – who live in often hostile circumstances around the world.

May I express a particular concern for the safety and freedom of the Ecumenical Patriarch and for the dwindling number of members of the Greek Orthodox Church in Istanbul.

I know the situation is well known to you. Although the Ecumenical Patriarchate has been established in Istanbul since the days of Constantinople 17 centuries ago, rooted in that place from the first days of Christianity, the Ecumenical Patriarch now experiences threats to his safety that require police protection and barbed-wire barriers. The Government of Turkey has severely restricted the functioning of the church, perhaps most notably by closing the church's Halki Seminary. His All Holiness himself has told a recent 60 Minutes interviewer that Greek Christians in Turkey are treated as second class citizens with diminished rights and freedom of expression. The interviewer noted that the Turkish government does not recognize the Ecumenical Patriarch as the international leader of the world's most ancient Christian church, but regards him as a local bishop.

Please know that our 36 member communions profoundly disagree. Patriarch Bartholomew is regarded by us as a world leader whose spiritual and moral authority has influenced us all. We are grieved that his safety and freedom are constantly threatened. And despite the many traditions and histories that our member churches bring to our council, we are emphatically agreed that a threat to the Ecumenical Patriarchate is a threat to Christians everywhere.

I appreciate the challenges of supporting oppressed groups who struggle with sovereign governments that the United States can only influence through example and diplomatic efforts. You have never hesitated to use the moral authority of the U.S. for just and necessary aims, and I am confident the safety of the Ecumenical Patriarch is as close to your heart as it is to ours.

Yours faithfully,

Michael Kinnamon
General Secretary