

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

President George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Condoleeza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

May 4, 2007

Dear President Bush and Secretary Rice:

We are writing to express our profound concern with the continued violations of religious, human, and property rights that the Republic of Turkey has perpetrated against the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Holy See for over 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide.

While we understand and appreciate the role Turkey must play as a strategic ally in our Global War on Terror, we are disappointed in Turkey's demonstrated lack of progress towards religious tolerance. As co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Hellenic Affairs, we are sensitive to nurturing the relationship between the United States and Turkey. A key factor in this relationship is ensuring Turkey grows as a secular, constitutional democracy.

As you know the characteristics of secular democracies necessarily include freedom of religion. While Turkey has made strides in other areas of modernization, it still falls far short of granting its citizens religious freedom. We make no extraordinary demands on Turkey, we simply ask that Turkey allow its citizens and institutions to be free of harassment based on religion.

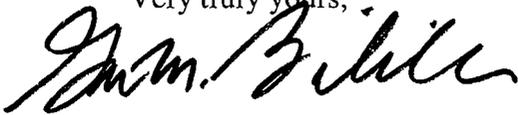
Like his predecessors before him, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has made extraordinary efforts to bridge the gap between Christianity and Islam. The Patriarch, whom the Orthodox Church considers the First amongst Equals, has been an ambassador of goodwill for the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In fact, the Ecumenical Patriarch has been proactive in assisting Turkey's cause on the world stage. His Excellency Bartholomew has stated that Turkey's admission into the European Union would, "...provide a concrete example and a powerful symbol of mutually beneficial cooperation between the western and Islamic worlds and put an end to the talk of the death of civilizations. This in turn would be a true strengthening of Europe and the European ideals that converge with the values of the 'pilgrims of the book' spoken of by the current Prime Minister of Turkey."

The Ecumenical Patriarchate has a record of reaching out and working for peace and reconciliation amongst all faiths and has fostered dialogue among Christians, Jews, and Muslims. What the Greek Orthodox community and all watchdogs of religious freedom throughout the world are asking for in return is simply that Turkey abides by the tenets of its constitution which secures religious rights for all of its citizens.

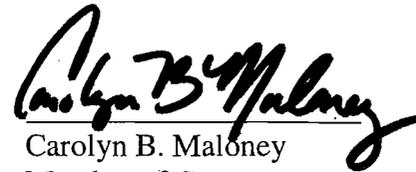
In accordance with your Administration's ambitious agenda to further develop a U.S.-Turkey strategic relationship over the next two years, we ask that you impress upon Turkey the need for it to grant the Ecumenical Patriarchate: ecclesiastic succession; the right to train clergy of all nationalities by reopening the Theological School at Halki, and respect for human rights and property rights.

By encouraging Turkey to promote and safeguard religious and human rights for the Ecumenical Patriarchate, you will be working to continue the democratization of Turkish society as a whole. For this, we and nearly 300 million Orthodox Christians would be eternally grateful.

Very truly yours,



Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress
Co-Chair of the Hellenic Caucus



Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress
Co-Chair of Hellenic Caucus