

July 11, 2020

STATEMENT REGARDING HAGIA SOPHIA

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

1. The Hagia Sophia was built as an iconic place of worship two hundred years before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and it has a glorious past in terms of humanities, religions and civilization and the history of Islam.
2. Historical data unanimously record that Hagia Sophia was originally built by its first constructors as a sanctuary for the purpose of worshipping God, who is one and created the universe from nothing. In fact, this divine goal continued uninterruptedly with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, when Sultan Mehmed II, the Conqueror succeeded in order to reach the honor of fulfilling the prophecy of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and this role continued until it was turned into a secular museum in 1934.
3. Following the conquest, Sultan Mehmed II, the Conqueror declared safety and protection charters (Emanname/ Ahdname) and assured freedom to all non-Muslims in Istanbul in practicing their diverse religious beliefs, practices, and acts of worshipping. In the original deed, Sultan Mehmed II protected their safety of life and property, especially their places of worship by stating that “we will protect you as we protect ourselves.” The only exception to this was that he designated the status of Hagia Sophia into a mosque and entrusted it to the Muslim *umamah* on the condition that it continues its existence as an Islamic house of worship until the apocalypse.
4. Unlike the fact that Hagia Sophia was subjected to severe ravage and destruction by its own believers from time to time in pre-conquest times, this unique place of worship was protected by our nation with great care and dignity, and even the name change was not needed. With the minarets added as the symbol of *tawhid* (the oneness of Allah), the continuity of its existence as a place of worship, which made the first constructors’ divine goals alive, was provided with prostrations (*sajdah*) to Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate for centuries.
5. The Hagia Sophia became more than a place of worship, with scientific institutions built around it in many fields such as Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), astronomy, mathematics, linguistics, and

theology. It has served as a science and wisdom complex as it was best reflected with its name, meaning *Holy Wisdom* until it was turned into a museum in 1934.

6. The Hagia Sophia was first closed to worship in 1931 for alleged repairs and then it was turned into a museum by a radical decision in 1934. Since then, this issue has led to great frustration in our nation due to the fact that it functioned in a way contrary to the sanctity of places of worship, the historical acquaintance, and our foundation tradition and the disappointment experienced has become a source of growing unrest in our society. The issue of whether Hagia Sophia has to be opened to worship or not has been discussed as an issue of independence and freedom and even as an issue of foreign guardianship by various segments of the society from time to time. This situation has become an unfulfilled demand by people and has deeply wounded almost every member of our nation.

7. Nonetheless, to consider the issue of re-opening up Hagia Sophia to worship as a part of an unrestricted turbulence on a global scale and to consider this innocent and just demands as a sign of a possible conflict between religions and civilizations has painted a sad picture in the eyes of our civilization, which had always opened its arms for all religions throughout history. While the discussions spreading in the West is dealing with the issue as a 'conversion' of a church into a mosque, the matter for our nation is essentially a museum turning back to its origins as a house of worship.

8. A place of worship from which the nation has been deprived for eighty-six years has opened its doors to believers again for worship after a disrupted and unpleasant process, which started in 1934, and as a result, the joy and enthusiasm of our whole nation is unparalleled. The unity of the different political parties, thinkers, and institutes in Turkey, when it comes to Hagia Sophia's sanctity, once again demonstrates how the steps taken to overcome this historical delay are justified.

9. Today, as it was yesterday, it is certain that Hagia Sophia, like our other place of worship, will keep its doors wide open, not only for the sincere believers but for anyone who wants to visit this iconic house of worship in order to reach the Divine Truth. And guests who will visit Hagia Sophia in their spirituality journey will find hosts who have proved at every opportunity that they are always ready for this responsibility as the successors of a long and ancient civilization.

10. For all these reasons, it is beyond all kinds of appreciation that Hagia Sophia is re-opened up to worship. On this occasion, the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's steps that articulate the accumulated feelings of the entire Islamic world has the potential to reconstruct a deep sense of deserved respect, a strong trust, and a powerful sense of belonging between us and humanity as a whole.

Respectfully Submitted to the Public.