



Virtual Meeting, 14 July 2020

## I.A.O. Statement on Hagia Sophia's conversion into a mosque

In the virtual meeting of 14.7.2020, the Secretary General, the President of the General Assembly, the members of the International Secretariat, as well as the Committee Chairpersons and Rapporteurs of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (I.A.O.) strongly condemned the arbitrary decision of the Executive of the Republic of Turkey, to repeal the museum status of the historic Hagia Sophia Church and proceed to its conversion into a mosque. This act signals a relapse to obsolete rationales and practices contrasting 21st century values that are aspiring towards peace, tolerance and mutual understanding among religions and civilizations.

It was also agreed that the aforementioned decision refutes the monument's actual history, character and value. As well known, Hagia Sophia, built in the 6th century, is a unique architectural wonder, fully justifying its characterization as World Heritage Site.

At a time when humankind is calling for universal solidarity in an effort to address major problems raised by Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, this decision practically refutes Turkey's role to serve as guardian of this universal monument and its history. The monument's instrumentalization to serve political agendas and purposes, ultimately fuels conflicts and tensions between religions. Nobody should ignore the fact that this unique World heritage Site, situated in Istanbul, between the East and the West, is a distinctive symbol of tolerance and common global culture; moreover, it is reminded that nationalistic grandiose narratives cannot be built on monuments of other cultures.

For these reasons, we call upon international and regional organizations, governments, fellow parliamentarians from all parliaments and assemblies, as well as leading authorities of religions and denominations, to join forces in a concerted effort to convince Turkey to repeal this improper and unfitting decision regarding Hagia Sophia. The I.A.O calls upon Turkish fellow parliamentarians participating in the UN initiative "Alliance of Civilizations", to join efforts for preserving world cultural values and contribute towards inter-religious peace.