



Athens, 1 July 2020

## STATEMENT

The Interparliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy (I.A.O.) realizes that the sudden and unprovoked debate over the change of the operation status of the historical World Heritage Monument Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey, causes feelings of wonder and resentment to all humans of good will, every believer, who through their activities and prayer try to safeguard and strengthen the understanding among the great world religions.

At present, believers all over the world are struggling to emerge from this tough and destructive fight with COVID-19, to redesign the future, to substantiate our partnerships and redefine the relational context in which we live and make decisions, strengthening all our social institutions, based on the principles of mutual understanding and mutual support.

It is no coincidence that UNESCO recognized the Monument, located in the center of Istanbul, as part of the World Heritage. Emperor Justinian built it about one thousand five hundred years ago, in 537, and following the decision of the founder of the modern Turkish State, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, in 1935, it was turned into a museum and a place of attraction for all visitors to Istanbul.

Any change in the museum's status serves no prospect of cooperation; in fact, it moves exactly to the opposite direction of the citizens' problems around the world, and will nullify every effort of inter-religious contribution towards their resolution and obviously will traumatize inter-confessional peace.