

**AHI statement on the 54<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Turkey's destruction of the  
110,000 Greek Orthodox Christian community of Istanbul  
and  
AHI's call for a compensation for its victims**

WASHINGTON, D.C.—September 6-7 2009, marked the 54<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1955 planned destruction of the Greek Orthodox Christian community of Istanbul by the Turkish government. The American Hellenic Institute (AHI) commemorates the memory of the victims of the Turkish government's atrocities against its remaining Christian minority and calls for full compensation for its victims and their heirs from the Turkish government.

In its attempt to demonstrate its interest in Cyprus at the time, as requested by Britain, the Turkish government planned a series of organized riots against its Greek citizens and residents in Istanbul and Izmir. The spark was set when a bomb placed by the Turkish government in the Turkish Consulate in Thessaloniki, Greece, exploded and a false report was spread that Kemal Ataturk's birthplace had been bombed and destroyed. The following account from an article in the June 1956 Harper's Magazine by John Phillips describes the carnage:

*"On the fifth of September 1955, a bomb exploded under singular circumstances inside the Turkish Consulate at Salonika in Northern Greece. The Turkish press and radio, over which the government is influential, blared out the incendiary and false report that the nearby birthplace of Kemal Ataturk, a sort of Turkish Mount Vernon on foreign soil, had also been destroyed. The events on the following day in Turkey were planned and executed with the same discipline the Nazis used in their onslaughts on the Jews. Squads of marauders were driven to the shopping area in trucks and taxis, waving picks and crowbars, consulting lists of addresses, and the police stood smiling. The Greek Consulate was destroyed in Izmir. Just nine out of eighty Greek Orthodox Churches in Istanbul were left undeseccrated; twenty-nine were demolished. Ghouls invaded the huge Greek cemetery where Patriarchs of Constantinople are buried, opened mausoleums, dug up graves, and flung bones into the streets; corpses waiting burial were lanced with knives. There had been no comparable destruction of Greek sanctuaries since the fall of Constantinople. The Turkish government did its best to keep the world from knowing. A familiar heavy hand fell upon the press, and editors who criticized Premier Menderez were jailed again."*

(Harper's Magazine, June 1956, 43, at 48. See also N.Y. Times, Sept. 7, 1955, at A1, col.5; Id., Sept 12, 1955, at A8, col.3 "The amount of damage has been assessed unofficially at \$300,000,000." Id., Sept. 13, 1955, at A10, col.6. )

AHI expresses its concerns about the situation of the 2,500 members of Greek Orthodox Christian community still living in Istanbul. While the remaining Greek Orthodox Christian Community is mostly comprised of elderly citizens, 54 years later, they still live under threat and are subject to serious oppression by the Turkish state.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in its Annual Report, published on May 2009, notes that:

“The existent governmental and societal obstacles place important restrictions upon the Greek Orthodox population’s property and ownership rights within the Turkish state.”

In its findings, the Commission notes that contrary to 1923 Treaty of Lausanne provisions, Turkey has specifically failed to implement the guarantees and protections granted for all non-Muslim religious minorities. The existent governmental and societal obstacles place important restrictions upon the Greek Orthodox population’s property and ownership rights within the Turkish state.

Moreover, the Commission recognizes that Turkey has systematically targeted the Greek Orthodox Christian community through a series of policies, resulting in killings, destruction of private and commercial properties, violation of religious sites and expropriation of income-generating properties of both private citizens and the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

In addition, the Amnesty International in its Annual Report on Turkey, published on June 2009, reaffirms the above facts and notes that:

“[...] In such a state of affairs, the Greek and other Christian minorities have been severely suppressed and have not been able to find legitimate outlets for expressing their concerns and advancing their interests [...] the survival of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Orthodox Christian community in Turkey is at risk.”

This serves as a prime example of orchestrated state action by Turkey which 54 years later, appears to have made no real progress as it unrelentingly continues to suppress the Greek Orthodox Christian community.

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