

Jerusalemites' Initiative Statement on Turkish Government decision to turn Hagia Sophia into a mosque - July 2020

On the 10th of July 2020 Turkey controversially overturned the Turkish cabinet decision of November 24, 1934, to transform the status of Hagia Sofia into a mosque instead of a museum. In addition, Turkey announced they will begin to hold five daily Muslim prayers inside the Hagia Sofia starting from Friday, July 24th 2020.

The decision has caused tensions between Christians worldwide and there has been an outcry from many countries including Russia, Greece, the USA and others. On the 10 July, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) decried the declaration that the ancient church would be converted into a mosque. USCIRF Vice Chair Tony Perkins said:

“USCIRF condemns the unequivocal politicization of the Hagia Sofia, an architectural wonder that has for so long stood as a cherished testament to a complex history and rich diversity. Both Christians and Muslims alike ascribe great cultural and spiritual importance to the Hagia Sophia, whose universal value to humankind was reaffirmed with its inclusion in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage List in 1985.”

The Jerusalemite Initiative has raised its voice to protest the Islamization of this holy site, which has deep significance to Christianity. We recently demonstrated against the decision to turn the Hagia Sophia church, which was built and completed by Emperor Justinian the Great in 537, into a mosque.

At our demonstration July 13 outside the Turkish Consulate in Jerusalem, tensions ensued between local Christians and Turkish Consulate guards. Unfortunately, both the Greek flag and the Turkish flag were damaged in the heat of the moment. The Jerusalemite Initiative in no way endorses the defacing of flags. We regret any damage done to either of those national flags at that time.

We also deeply regret that Turkey has not chosen to retain the neutral status of the Hagia Sofia, thus raising tensions between Christians and Muslims by Islamizing such an ancient and revered Christian site.