

Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans (E.F.C.)

UN Human Rights Council

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Item 3 General Debate

Delivered by Dominique Morabito

Thank you Mr President,

The Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans (E.F.C.) wishes to present its views to the Council and attaches high importance to the Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion. Many practices outlined in this report apply to the minority Greek-Orthodox community of Istanbul (Community). This Community has principally a religious identity. Indeed, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (Patriarchate), the Spiritual Centre of Eastern Orthodox Church, which has more than 300 million believers around the world, has its seat in Istanbul since the 4th century.

The Community faces bureaucratic restrictions, structural discrimination, confiscation of property and denial of legal status of its institutions, briefly as follows:

The Patriarchate, as well as the churches under its jurisdiction all over the world, has been served by training each clergyman and staff at its Chalki Theological School near Istanbul. This School is a professional high level educational institution. It has been functioning since 1844 till its closure in 1971 by the Turkish Government prohibiting non-state universities. Many appeals during the last 42 years to open the School were unsuccessful.

The second issue is the ownership of 17 historical monasteries and their properties which were legally declared by the Government "abandoned" and taken under its supervision, despite the fact that they are still used by the Community.

Another concern is the illegal occupation of 3 Orthodox churches and their properties in Karakoy (Galata, Istanbul) by the descendants of the late Efthim Karahisaridis who established in 1924 a self-declared "Turkish Orthodox Church" with the support of the Government of the time. This church has not any link with the Patriarchate.

Finally, and most importantly, the Patriarchate, this 1700 years old and world recognized religious institution, has no legal status in its own homeland, Turkey. This situation leads to countless legal and administrative problems.

We hope that with the information about religious minorities recently provided by the media in Turkey and the awareness brought to the attention of this Council, the Greek-Orthodox minority will overcome the prejudices and reconcile its differences with the Turkish State.

Thank you for your attention.