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ECUMENICAL FEDERATION OF CONSTANTINOPOLITANS

A Prolonged Serious Religious Freedom violation, result of the
Illegal Occupation of the three Greek-Orthodox Churches in the
District of Karaköy of Istanbul

Three historical churches in the central district of Istanbul, Karaköy (Galata) remain under the illegal occupation of the self-declared "Turkish-Orthodox Church" which has no followers but a few family members of its "founder". No other Church recognized the so called "Turkish -Orthodox Church".

This prolonged serious religious rights violation against the Greek-Orthodox Minority goes back to 1920's, when a priest named Eftim Karahisaridis - Erenerol, this Turkish name which he took later, in his effort to self-declare himself as leader of a non-existing Turkish-Orthodox Community occupied illegally, during the period 1923-1965, four churches belonging to Greek-Orthodox Community. Their history goes back to the Ottoman era as well as Byzantine. The names of the Churches are: Virgin Mary of Kafatiani, Saint John of Chiotas, Saint Nicolas while the church Christ Saviour was expropriated in 1957 and the corresponding compensation was taken illegally by Eftim. The nationalist governments of that time supported him and remained indifferent to the serious violations of the Constitution of Turkey and International Treaties endorsed by the Republic of Turkey. The fact is the real incentives of Eftim were economical since in addition to the occupation of the mentioned Churches he held and exploit the 52 buildings, at the economic centre of Istanbul, which belongs to the Orthodox Churches. The same illegal occupation continued by the two Eftim's sons, Selcuk and Turgut Erenerol, after his death in 1968. This illegal occupation is continuing by the descendants of Eftim. No other Christian Church recognized the self-declared "Turkish-Orthodox Church". There has been no follower of this self-declared "Church" while during the period 2007-2010 it has been known that the Church Virgin Mary of Kafatiani was used as the headquarter of a terrorist organization.

The continuing illegal occupation of the mentioned three Churches constitutes a serious violation of the rights of the Greek-Orthodox Community of Istanbul resulting from the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 as well as the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey and the European Convention of Human Rights. Despite many appeals to the Government of the Republic of Turkey to honor the Constitution of Turkey guaranteeing the ownership rights and the European Convention of Human Rights, which is part from 1954, no action has been taken.

The Government of the Republic of Turkey is called upon to take all the necessary administrative measures to reconstitute the rule of law, so that the mentioned Churches and their real estate, returned immediately to their legal owners, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek-Orthodox Community of Istanbul.