[UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION OF THE ORIGINAL TEXT IN TURKISH]



(*Private*)



(*Bismillahirrahmanirrahim)*

*(In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful)*

**PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY**

**Presidency of Religious Affairs**

22 July 2020

I would like to begin by praying for your health and well-being. May Allah the Almighty protect you, your family and all our Muslim brothers in your country; may he also obviate your troubles; and bestow serenity and happiness upon you.

As you know, Sultan Fatih Mehmet Khan's legacy, the symbol of the conquest, the sacred sanctuary of Istanbul, Hagia Sophia has recently been converted from a museum into a mosque by a ruling of the State Council and a Presidential decree. First of all, like every Muslim, I would like to share with you my jubilant excitement and happiness for this change.

Hagia Sophia is not only the most ancient building in Istanbul, it is also a masterpiece that bears close witness to the almost fifteen century old history of this geography. As a matter of fact, it served as a cathedral until it was converted into a mosque following the glorious conquest in 1453, accompanied by moments of sadness and sorrow, as well as joy. It served as a mosque for 481 years, from 1453 to 1934. Our great Ottoman architect Sinan extended the life of this sanctuary with his appropriately executed buttresses and reinforcements. Almost every Ottoman Sultan made many contributions to sustain the mosque and to further beautify it, enriching its value.

Throughout history, nations have come across adversities. In such a period, scientific activities cease, a decline is witnessed in arts, civilization makes no progress, wealth becomes poverty, and happiness becomes misery. This is, indeed, a manifestation of the following divine edict: (*These are the days that we humans shall pass through)*. Just like nations, Hagia Sophia has also experienced such a period full of adversities for 86 years.

Every Muslim in Turkey who strives to uphold religious values and desires to resurrect Islamic civilization has always been nurturing a love for Hagia Sophia in his heart. Hence, for years, marches were organized, plays were staged and poems were written so that it would be converted back into a place of worship.

Hearts were torn out as the following lines were read: “*Whoever changes my endowment of this pious foundation which has transformed Hagia Sophia into a mosque, makes alterations to a clause of it, revokes it or tries to cancel it, means to repeal the founding provision of the Hagia Sophia Mosque with a vicious attitude or through an interpretation or deception which is an open sin, changes its essence, objects to its posterity and guides and helps those who do these things, declares its documents null and void, takes them out of the mosque and falsifies their content and demands trusteeship rights, or seizes them by deception, I say before you that he has committed the greatest crime and earned the greatest sin. Whoever changes this endowment, shall the eternal curse of Allah, the Prophet, the angels, all the rulers and even all Muslims be upon him and them. Their torment shall not be alleviated; they shall not be looked at in the face on the day of Hashr (the Gathering). Whoever still continues with these alterations after hearing these words, the sin shall be upon him for committing this crime. Allah’s torment shall be upon them. Allah is the One who hears and knows.*” But thank to Allah, Hagia Sophia's adversities period has come to an end. With the wisdom of our President, it has been turned into a place henceforth where believers prostrate before Allah.

Yes, today Hagia Sophia is experiencing one of its resurrections that it has witnessed many times since the date it was built. If Allah permits, its resurrection will herald the liberation of Masjid al-Aqsa. Its resurrection will be a source of hope regarding the future, for the oppressed and grieved believers; it will also be the first sign of the new upsurge of our civilization, which has risen on the basis of justice, compassion and morality.

I wholeheartedly congratulate you on the sacred Eid al-Adha; I would like to call upon Allah the Almighty that this Bairam may bring love, peace, tranquillity and happiness to all humanity, in particular to the Islamic world.

With these feelings and thoughts in mind, I hope to stand in prayer with your Excellency in Hagia Sophia at Your earliest convenience, and convey my warmest greetings and respects.

(*signature*)

Prof. Dr. Ali Erbaş

President of Religious Affairs

of the Republic of Turkey