

ONE HUNDRED FIRST LEGISLATURE

SECOND SESSION

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION 273

Introduced by Howard, 9.

Read first time January 06, 2010

Committee: Government, Military and Veterans Affairs

WHEREAS, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, located in Istanbul, Turkey, is the sacred see that presides in a spirit of brotherhood over a communion of self-governing churches in the Orthodox Christian world; and

WHEREAS, the see is led by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who is the 270th in the line of direct succession going back to the Apostle Andrew and holds titular primacy as primus inter pares, meaning "first among equals," in the community of Orthodox churches worldwide; and

WHEREAS, the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 defines the relationship of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the Turkish state, which continues to systematically violate the provisions of the treaty; and

WHEREAS, in 1997 the Congress of the United States awarded Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew the Congressional Gold Medal; and

WHEREAS, the Orthodox Christian Church, in existence for nearly two thousand years, numbers approximately three hundred million members worldwide with more than two million members in the

United States; and

WHEREAS, Orthodox Christian communities have existed in the State of Nebraska for over one hundred years, some of whom are part of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, which maintains a direct ecclesiastical connection to the Ecumenical Patriarchate; and

WHEREAS, since 1453 the continuing presence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Turkey has been a living testament to the religious coexistence of Christians and Muslims; and

WHEREAS, this religious coexistence is in jeopardy because the Turkish government refuses to recognize the rights and religious freedoms of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which is considered a minority religion by the Turkish government; and

WHEREAS, from the millions of Orthodox Christians living in Turkey at the turn of the twentieth century, and due to the continued policies of minority discrimination, a form of "ethnic cleansing," during this period by the Turkish government, there remain less than three thousand of the Ecumenical Patriarch's flock in Turkey today; and

WHEREAS, the Turkish government has failed to honor its agreement to reopen the Theological School on the island of Halki (Heybeliada), which the Turkish government closed in 1971, thus impeding the religious education of Orthodox Christian clergy; and

WHEREAS, the Turkish government has confiscated nearly ninety-four percent of the properties of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and has placed a forty-two percent tax retroactive to 1999 on the Baloukli Hospital and Home for the Aged, a charity hospital run by the Ecumenical Patriarchate; and

WHEREAS, the European Union, a group of nations with

a common goal of promoting peace and the well-being of its peoples, which has defined membership criteria including stability of democratic institutions and adherence to the rule of law, began accession negotiations with Turkey on October 3, 2005; and

WHEREAS, the Turkish government's current treatment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is inconsistent with the membership conditions and goals of the European Union; and

WHEREAS, Orthodox Christians in the State of Nebraska and throughout the United States stand to lose their spiritual leader because of the continued actions of the Turkish government.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIRST LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA, SECOND SESSION:

1. That the Legislature, in solidarity with other states that have adopted similar resolutions, urge the United States in its relations with the Turkish government to encourage the Turkish government to do the following:

a. Uphold and safeguard religious and human rights without compromise;

b. Cease its discrimination of the Ecumenical Patriarchate;

c. Grant the Ecumenical Patriarch appropriate international recognition, ecclesiastical succession, and the right to train clergy of all nationalities; and

d. Respect the property rights and human rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

2. That copies of this resolution be sent to the President of the United States, the Secretary of State of the United States, and the Nebraska congressional delegation.