

## **REJECT RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY**

The Amendment to the Fiscal Year 2012 Foreign Relations Authorization Act derives from a previous legislative effort by its sponsors, H.Res.306, which was a back-door version of the perennial “Armenian Genocide Resolution.” The Resolution accused the Ottoman Empire of “intentional destruction” of Christians – adopting the primary definition for genocide - and lumped together unrelated historical events and groups, without any legal or historical basis and context. Both H.Res.306 and the passed amendment feed on religious prejudices against Muslims, attempt to rewrite history without any real life impact, other than fanning religious animosity and perpetuating ancient conflicts at a time when Congress should be given the exact opposite message to the world.

- The Amendment is motivated not by humanitarian ideals, but by political considerations designed to appease pro-Greek and pro-Armenian lobbies **as it turns a blind eye to the gross violations against the cultural and sacred heritage, as well as religious freedoms of others**, such as Muslims and other Christians in Armenia, Greece, as well as Greek Cyprus.

### EXAMPLES OF DESTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE:

#### **Greece**

- Athens is the only European capital with no mosque. There are also no mosques in Thessaloniki.
- Turkish mosques and cemeteries in Greece are frequently vandalized and desecrated, the perpetrators escape justice.
- Turks in Greece are prevented from running their pious foundations, resulting in the confiscation or despair of their properties. Turks in Greece are frequently prevented from repairing their mosques and other religious sites. There are cases of prison sentences and fines for simply repairing a mosque.
- Turkish historical and cultural heritage sites are neglected. The historical Fethiye Mosque in Athens is in despair and has remained closed despite Turkey’s offers to help with the restoration.
- Greece does not recognize its Macedonian minority in Greece and does not allow the Macedonian Church to function in Greece.

### **Armenia**

- There is only one functioning mosque, Blue Mosque (Goy Mescit) that remains in entire Armenia today in Yerevan, and one semi-destroyed non-functioning one, also in Yerevan. All other mosques have been destroyed. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century alone, there used to be over 200 mosques in what are today the borders of Armenia.
- According to a report by Forum 18, a Christian religious freedoms watchdog, on July 15, 2011, 'Armenia's religious minorities face barriers to their exercising freedom of religion or belief from senior officials, politicians, media outlets and priests of the dominant Armenian Apostolic Church.' Persecuted religious minorities included Pentecostals and Yehovah's Witnesses. In addition, both the Collaboration For Democracy Centre and the Helsinki Committee of Armenia have documented numerous instances of official and media intolerance, leading to denials of freedom of religion or belief, Forum 18 reports.

### **Greek Cyprus**

- 16 out of 106 mosques in Greek Cyprus were totally ruined, 61 of them are deserted and falling apart. There are only 2 active mosques in Greek Cyprus, but both are without clergy due to Greek Cypriot restrictions.

### **TURKEY – THE REALITY:**

- There are 101 places of worship for less than 5,000 Greek Orthodox citizens of Turkey.
- There are 55 (Gregorian, Catholic and Protestant) Armenian Churches in Turkey open to religious services of the nearly 60,000 Armenian citizens of Turkey.
- There are 36 synagogues for about 25,000 Jewish citizens of Turkey.
- Turkey has become the first country to implement a property verdict by the European Court of Human Rights, returning a historical orphanage to the Greek Orthodox minority.
- Turkey has restored 12 Christian and Jewish heritage sites, including 1 synagogue and 12 churches from 2003-2010, restoration continues at 2 synagogues, 2 monastery and 3 churches. Among the most notable Christian heritage sites restored by Turkey are the Akdamar Armenian church in Van and the Osk Vank Georgian church near Erzurum. A major restoration project is being undertaken by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and the World Monuments Fund to restore the historical Armenian heritage site of Ani in Kars, including the Ani Cathedral and the Church of the Holy Savior.

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**CONCLUSION:**

The passed Amendment is detrimental to the vital interests of the United States. The United States` fight against global terrorism demands that the US is perceived as an even-handed, fair defender of human and religious rights and freedoms, regardless of religion, race or ethnicity.

Consequently, we call on Members of Congress to reject this mentality and the religious bigotry it represents and adopt a balanced approach to safeguarding religious heritage and freedoms.