

By: Huffman

S.C.R. No. 70

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1 WHEREAS, The Ecumenical Patriarchate, located in modern-day
2 Istanbul, formerly known as Constantinople, in the Republic of
3 Turkey, is the Sacred See that presides over a community of
4 self-governing churches of the Orthodox Christian world; and

5 WHEREAS, The See is led by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,
6 who is the 269th direct successor of the Apostle Andrew and who
7 holds titular primacy as *primus inter pares*, "first among equals,"
8 in the community of Orthodox Churches worldwide; the Orthodox
9 Church has been in existence for nearly 2,000 years and numbers
10 approximately 300 million members around the world, with more than
11 2 million members in the United States; and

12 WHEREAS, The government of Turkey refuses to recognize the
13 international status and the rights and religious freedoms of the
14 Ecumenical Patriarchate, the head of the Greek Orthodox Christian
15 Church, which is a minority religion in Turkey; and

16 WHEREAS, The government of Turkey and Turkish prime ministers
17 have limited the candidates available to the Holy Synod for
18 selection as the Ecumenical Patriarch to Turkish nationals who have
19 performed mandatory military service in the Turkish armed forces,
20 and they continue to insist that any new spiritual head of Orthodox
21 Christians, including Orthodox Christians in Texas and throughout
22 the United States, be approved by them; because of selective
23 enforcement of laws and regulations, the once large eligible
24 community of Turkish citizens of the Orthodox faith has declined to

1 only approximately 2,500 persons, most of whom are elderly; and

2 WHEREAS, Before its closure, the Theological School of Halki
3 was the only educational institution for Orthodox Christianity in
4 Turkey; the school was closed in 1971 by Turkish authorities under a
5 law requiring that higher education in religion and minority
6 training be controlled by the state; and

7 WHEREAS, The United States Congress passed a resolution
8 expressing its sentiment that the Orthodox Theological School of
9 Halki in the Republic of Turkey should be reopened in order to
10 promote religious freedom; and

11 WHEREAS, The government of Turkey has reneged on its
12 agreement to reopen the Theological School of Halki, thus impeding
13 training for Orthodox Christian clergy within its borders; and

14 WHEREAS, In recent years, the government of Turkey has, in
15 violation of the inalienable rights of all peoples, confiscated
16 more than 90 percent of the properties of the Ecumenical
17 Patriarchate and has placed a 42 percent tax, retroactive to 1999,
18 on the nonprofit Balukli hospital, which is run by the Ecumenical
19 Patriarchate; and

20 WHEREAS, The dissolution of the spiritual head of Orthodox
21 Christian Churches in the coming decades is inevitable if Turkey
22 continues its policy of interference in religious matters, despite
23 the government's stated policy of being purely secular in its
24 dealings; and

25 WHEREAS, All Christians in our state, in the United States,
26 and around the world stand to lose this nearly 2,000-year-old
27 Sacred See, where the text of the New Testament was codified, the

1 canonical structure of the Christian church was established, and
2 the Nicene Creed was written and first pronounced; the
3 disappearance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate would mean the loss of
4 a crucial link between Christians and their religious history,
5 sacred texts, and religious forebears; and

6 WHEREAS, The disappearance of this See would also mean the
7 end of a crucial link between Christians and the Muslim world; at a
8 time when individuals hostile to the United States are attempting
9 to create conflict between Christians and Muslims, the continuing
10 presence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Turkey is a powerful
11 testament to the coexistence of these two faiths in Istanbul since
12 1453; and

13 WHEREAS, Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks
14 on America, the spiritual leader of Orthodox Christians, Ecumenical
15 Patriarch Bartholomew, gathered international religious leaders
16 and produced the first statement signed by Muslim leaders that
17 condemned the attacks as "anti-religious"; and

18 WHEREAS, The importance of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
19 to the United States is reflected in the record number of
20 Congressional cosponsors of the measure that bestowed on him
21 America's highest civilian award, the Congressional Gold Medal of
22 Honor--an award also given to George Washington, Winston Churchill,
23 Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, and Pope John Paul II; and

24 WHEREAS, The European Union, a group of nations with a common
25 goal of promoting peace and the well-being of its peoples, began
26 accession negotiations with Turkey on October 3, 2005; and

27 WHEREAS, The European Union defined membership criteria for

1 accession to the European Union at the Copenhagen European Council
2 in 1993, obligating candidate countries to have achieved certain
3 levels of reform, including stability of institutions guaranteeing
4 democracy, adherence to the rule of law, and respect for and
5 protection of minorities and human rights; and

6 WHEREAS, The Treaty of Amsterdam, which came into effect in
7 1999, affirms that the European Union is founded on the principles
8 of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental
9 freedoms, and the rule of law; Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty
10 enables the European Council to take appropriate action to combat
11 discrimination based on religion or belief; and

12 WHEREAS, Turkey's current treatment of the Ecumenical
13 Patriarchate is inconsistent with the membership conditions and
14 goals of the European Union; and

15 WHEREAS, The United States has long been a beacon of hope for
16 vulnerable and disenfranchised people around the world, and the
17 State of Texas has long valued and defended the principles of
18 democracy, individual liberty, freedom of speech, and freedom of
19 religion; as citizens of conscience of this great land, we bear both
20 the responsibility and the honor to raise our voices against
21 injustice in behalf of those unable to speak for themselves; now,
22 therefore, be it

23 RESOLVED, That the 81st Legislature of the State of Texas
24 hereby express its support for the Ecumenical Patriarchate and urge
25 the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations, as
26 leaders of the international community, to encourage the government
27 of Turkey to cease its discrimination against one of the oldest

1 institutions in Christianity, the Ecumenical Patriarchate; and, be
2 it further

3 RESOLVED, That the State of Texas call on the government of
4 Turkey to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on religion
5 and to immediately grant the Ecumenical Patriarchate appropriate
6 international recognition, the right to determine ecclesiastic
7 succession, and the right to train clergy of all nationalities;
8 and, be it further

9 RESOLVED, That the State of Texas call on the government of
10 Turkey to pledge to uphold and safeguard religious rights without
11 compromise; and, be it further

12 RESOLVED, That the Texas secretary of state forward official
13 copies of this resolution to the president of the United States, to
14 the United States ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, to the
15 ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the United States, to the
16 presidents of the commission, parliament, and Council of the
17 European Union, to the secretary general of the United Nations, to
18 the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the
19 senate of the United States Congress, and to all the members of the
20 Texas delegation to Congress with the request that this resolution
21 be officially entered in the Congressional Record as a memorial to
22 the Congress of the United States of America.