

## H. RES. 306

### Urging the Republic of Turkey to safeguard its Christian heritage and to return confiscated church properties.

#### IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

June 15, 2011

#### RESOLUTION

Urging the Republic of Turkey to safeguard its Christian heritage and to return confiscated church properties.

Whereas the United States has an interest in protecting and preserving the rights of national, religious, and ethnic groups worldwide;

Whereas the United States remains concerned about the welfare of Christian communities within the Republic of Turkey, their right to worship and practice their faiths freely, and the legal status and condition of churches and other places of worship, monasteries, schools, hospitals, monuments, relics, holy sites, and other religious properties in the Republic of Turkey;

Whereas the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) affirms that '(e)veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance';

Whereas the Republic of Turkey is a signatory to the UDHR and therefore is obligated to accord to all its citizens, including religious minorities, 'freedom of thought, conscience, and religion', as defined by the UDHR;

Whereas the Ottoman Empire's oppression and intentional destruction of much of its ancient Christian populations, including over 2,000,000 Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, Pontians, and Syriacs, has left only a small fraction of these populations to care for their vast religious heritage within modern Turkey;

Whereas the non-Muslim population in the contemporary Republic of Turkey is less than one percent of the total population, rendering these religious communities especially vulnerable;

Whereas the Republic of Turkey has been responsible for the destruction and theft of much of the Christian heritage within its borders;

Whereas the Republic of Turkey, through official and unofficial acts of discrimination, intolerance, and intimidation, has hindered the remaining Christians on its territory from freely practicing their ancient faiths;

Whereas in its 2011 Annual Report, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom placed Turkey on its 'Watch List' for the third straight year, and concluded that 'The Turkish government continues to impose serious limitations on freedom of religion or belief, thereby threatening the continued vitality and survival of minority religious communities in Turkey.'; and

Whereas Turkish reforms carried out over the past decade to ameliorate the situation of religious minorities have been sorely inadequate:  
Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the House of Representatives urges the Government of Turkey to honor its obligations under international treaties and human rights law to—

(1) end all forms of religious discrimination;

(2) allow the rightful church and lay owners of Christian church properties, without hindrance or restriction, to organize and administer prayer services, religious education, clerical training, appointments, and succession, religious community gatherings, social services, including ministry to the needs of the poor and infirm, and other religious activities;

(3) return to their rightful owners all Christian churches and other places of worship, monasteries, schools, hospitals, monuments, relics, holy sites, and other religious properties, including movable properties, such as artwork, manuscripts, vestments, vessels, and other artifacts; and

(4) allow the rightful Christian church and lay owners of Christian church properties, without hindrance or restriction, to preserve, reconstruct, and repair, as they see fit, all Christian churches and other places of worship, monasteries, schools, hospitals, monuments, relics, holy sites, and other religious properties within Turkey.