

**ECUMENICAL FEDERATION OF CONSTANTINOPOLITANS**

**Statement at the**

**SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING**

**of the Organization Security and Cooperation in Europe**

**1-2 April 2019**

**Achievement of Revitalization of Victim Communities of the past is an Essential Component Strengthening Human Rights**

**The case of the Greek-Orthodox Community of Istanbul**

The strengthening of the Rule of Law and respect of Human Rights is directly linked with essential remedy measures towards the victim communities whose rights have been violated. This is highly important in the case of the communities driven towards an almost annihilation. Urgent measures are needed for such communities to survive and continue with their historical existence and their role to the country they belong. The Greek-Orthodox Community of Istanbul constituting with its 125.000 members the 15% of the city's population at the foundation of Republic of Turkey in 1923, presently are living as an expatriate community up to 98% of its population out of their native city of Istanbul. This occurred, as we have reported several times in this forum, because of the state driven discriminatory measures and the violation of human rights throughout Twenty Century. To mention the most serious violations we note:

- Abolishment of the Minority Council (1925).
- In 1932 prohibition of 20 professions to Community members exempted from population exchange.
- Restrictions imposed on the functions of the Minority Welfare Foundations function (1936) and mass scale confiscations of their real estate properties especially in 1974.
- The forced labour camps for those aged 18-45, 45.000 Minority men during the years 1941-42.

- The imposition of a Capital Tax named “Varlik Vergisi” solely to the Minority Citizens in November 1942 which lasted until August 1944, resulting into the economic destruction of the Minority Communities.
- The mass scale Pogrom of 6-7 September 1955 leading into more than 30 deaths, hundreds of raped women, burning of 73 Churches, 20 Schools and Institutions.
- Deportation of 12.500 members of the Community who, however, held the status of “Etablis” according the Lausanne Treaty.

Throughout the 20nty Century the measures against the non-Muslim minorities in Turkey has been continuous stemming from a long term banishment program using administrative measures against both the institutions (schools such as the continuing closure of the Heybeliada Clergy School, mass scale confiscation of Welfare Foundation properties etc,) and also on personal level against the minority citizens by mass scale organized discriminatory attitude and in particular presenting them as agents of foreign states.

It is an undisputable fact that these measures has little to do with the external relations of Republic of Turkey and were a result of nationalist ideologies and policies conceiving any minority element as a potential threat to state security without the existence of a such threat.

The Present Government of Turkey being in power from the year 2003 on several occasions recognized the unjust acts of the past against the Greek-Orthodox Community. Recently (22 April 2018) the President Republic of Turkey Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a nationwide TV interview recognized this fact saying that: “there were thousands I say hundred thousand Greek-Orthodox (Rum) in our country. They were forced to emigrate because of mistakes and this was a pity”. During the last 8 years the EFC pursued a policy of direct communication with the Government of Turkey functionaries to alleviate the consequences of above mentioned violations by formulating and implementing remedy measures. The principal aim of the proposed measures is to prevent the disappearance of the Community residing in their native city Istanbul. Despite some noticeable improvements in some issues such as: restitution of citizenships, change of attitude towards Community Welfare Foundations and especially towards the Ecumenical Patriarchate, there are still many pending issues to mention such the

prohibition of elections in Welfare Foundations and the return of their real estate properties which have been confiscated in the past. However the most important measure is the necessity the State of Turkey to support the repatriation of young generation members of the Community by implementing measures that have been proposed in the past by the EFC.

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*Remedy and Reparations towards the victim communities of the past should be essential component in the context of Human Rights.*

Respect and unconditional implementation of human rights principles is considered to be the fundamental prerequisite of true rule of law in state entities. However, this quite often remains a promise and many times states are inclined to violate fundamental human rights and many times contrary to their own legislation even to their constitutional charters. The long-term violation of rights of ethnoreligious communities many times leads to the disappearance of autochthonous communities from their historical cradles. If the Human Rights context is not enriched by specific legislations of remedy and reparations of communities that has been victim of human rights violations, then promises of respecting the violated rights is meaningless and a vague promise. Furthermore, generous measures of reparation and reparations will strengthen the Rule of Law in the country were violations took place. The U.N. General Assembly Resolution 60/147 has a key role on this subject.

The Greek-Orthodox Community of Istanbul, which is an international recognized minority according to international Lausanne Treaty which was the foundation stone of modern Republic of Turkey, faced serious violations of its rights throughout the period 1923-2003 for eighty years. Already EFC in past sessions has reported the severe human rights violations against the Community. As a result, the Community being of 100.000 early in 1960's presently is only few thousand members in majority by aged population. The present administration of Turkey which is in power from 2003 has taken measures for alleviating the injustices of the past in some scale. However, these measures are not sufficient to overturn the disappearance of the Community from Istanbul.

EFC starting of the year 2010 has initiated a dialogue with authorities of Republic of Turkey in the effort to prevent the disappearance of the Community through remedy and reparation measures to alleviate the consequences of the past violations. This dialogue is continuing during the recent years, although in limited scale, has provided examples to show the possibility of reparation of past injustices. The cases to mention are the improvement of the conditions in minority education system, problems being faced by minority welfare foundations despite the fact that numerous pending problems exist and the most important one is the change of attitude of administrative functionaries. However, these are not sufficient to cope with the prime problem of the very existence of the Community. This could be achieved by the implementation of a specific program which should have as a focus the active support by the Republic of Turkey the repatriation of young generation members of the Expatriated Greek-Orthodox Community of Istanbul. EFC during the last 6 years has submitted specific proposals to the Government of Turkey for this goal.

The Government of Republic of Turkey is invited to act immediately on these proposals of the EFC.