



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

Mr. Nick Larigakis
President & CEO of American Hellenic Institute
1220 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036

February 28, 2024

Dear Mr. Larigakis:

Thank you for your February 12 letter to Secretary Blinken expressing the concerns of the American Hellenic Institute's members about the Government of Türkiye's plans to finalize the conversion of the Chora Museum and re-open it as a mosque on February 23. He asked that I respond on his behalf.

The United States views a change in the status of the Chora Museum as diminishing the legacy of this remarkable building. The site's historical, cultural, and religious significance should serve to educate and enrich society as a centuries-old reminder of the diverse faiths and traditions that have shaped Türkiye. It is essential the site remains accessible to all and that the art and architecture are preserved. We understand the conversion has been delayed until at least May and we will continue to monitor the situation.

Additionally, we continue to call on the Government of Türkiye to ensure another historical and religious landmark, the Hagia Sophia, remains accessible to people from all over the world and the magnificent iconography and artwork be visible to stand as testament to religious expression and artistic genius that have defined its 1500+ year history. We also continue to call upon the Government of Türkiye to allow the re-opening of the Halki Seminary.

The United States advocates for the protection and preservation of all cultural heritage and religiously significant sites. We will continue to seek to work with the Government of Türkiye on these issues. I am available to meet with you to discuss these and other religious freedom issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rashad Hussain', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rashad Hussain
U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom