

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 15

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA
TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY REPRESENTATIVES HARRIS, Lynn

Introduced: 2/23/10

Referred: Rules

A RESOLUTION

1 **Relating to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and religious rights.**

2 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:**

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

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

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

14 **WHEREAS** the government of Turkey and Turkish prime ministers have limited the
15 candidates available to the Holy Synod for selection as the Ecumenical Patriarch to Turkish
16 nationals who have performed mandatory military service in the Turkish armed forces, and

1 they continue to insist that any new spiritual head of Orthodox Christians, including Orthodox
2 Christians in Alaska and throughout the United States, be approved by them; because of
3 selective enforcement of laws and regulations, the once large eligible community of Turkish
4 citizens of the Orthodox faith has declined to only approximately 2,500 persons, most of
5 whom are elderly; and

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

10 **WHEREAS** the United States Congress passed a resolution expressing its sentiment
11 that the Theological School of Halki in the Republic of Turkey should be reopened in order to
12 promote religious freedom; and

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

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

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

23 **WHEREAS** all Christians in our state, in the United States, and around the world
24 stand to lose this nearly 2,000-year-old Sacred See, where the text of the New Testament was
25 codified, the canonical structure of the Christian church was established, and the Nicene
26 Creed was written and first pronounced; the disappearance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate
27 would mean the loss of a crucial link between Christians and their religious history, sacred
28 texts, and religious forebears; and

29 **WHEREAS** the disappearance of this See would also mean the end of a crucial link
30 between Christians and the Muslim world; at a time when individuals hostile to the United
31 States are attempting to create conflict between Christians and Muslims, the continuing

1 presence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Turkey is a powerful testament to the coexistence
2 of these two faiths in Istanbul since 1453; and

3 **WHEREAS**, following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on America, the
4 spiritual leader of Orthodox Christians, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, gathered
5 international religious leaders and produced the first statement signed by Muslim leaders that
6 condemned the attacks as "anti-religious"; and

7 **WHEREAS** the importance of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the United
8 States is reflected in the record number of Congressional cosponsors of the measure that
9 bestowed on him America's highest civilian award, the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor--
10 an award also given to George Washington, Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela, Mother
11 Teresa, and Pope John Paul II; and

12 **WHEREAS** the European Union, a group of nations with a common goal of
13 promoting peace and the well-being of its peoples, began accession negotiations with Turkey
14 on October 3, 2005; and

15 **WHEREAS** the European Union defined membership criteria for accession to the
16 European Union at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, obligating candidate countries
17 to have achieved certain levels of reform, including stability of institutions guaranteeing
18 democracy, adherence to the rule of law, and respect for and protection of minorities and
19 human rights; and

20 **WHEREAS** the Treaty of Amsterdam, which came into effect in 1999, affirms that
21 the European Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human
22 rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law; Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty
23 enables the European Council to take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on
24 religion or belief; and

25 **WHEREAS** Turkey's current treatment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is inconsistent
26 with the membership conditions and goals of the European Union; and

27 **WHEREAS** the United States has long been a beacon of hope for vulnerable and
28 disenfranchised people around the world, and the state has long valued and defended the
29 principles of democracy, individual liberty, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion; as
30 citizens of conscience of this great land, we bear both the responsibility and the honor to raise
31 our voices against injustice on behalf of those unable to speak for themselves;

1 **BE IT RESOLVED** that the House of Representatives supports the Ecumenical
2 Patriarchate and urges the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations, as
3 leaders of the international community, to encourage the government of Turkey to end its
4 discrimination against the Ecumenical Patriarchate, one of the oldest Christian institutions in
5 the world; and be it

6 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the House of Representatives urges the Governor to
7 call on the government of Turkey to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on religion
8 and to immediately grant the Ecumenical Patriarchate appropriate international recognition
9 and the right to train clergy of all nationalities; and be it

10 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the House of Representatives calls on the government
11 of Turkey to pledge to uphold and safeguard religious rights without compromise.

12 **COPIES** of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Namik Tan, Ambassador of
13 the Republic of Turkey; the Honorable Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European
14 Union; the Honorable Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations; the Honorable
15 Barack Obama, President of the United States; the Honorable James F. Jeffery, United States
16 Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey; and the Honorable Lisa Murkowski and the
17 Honorable Mark Begich, U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative,
18 members of the Alaska delegation in Congress.