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## Human Rights Council

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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[19 August 2023]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Where Do Human Rights Principles Stand if the Extinction of a Minority Is Taken as a Fait Accompli? The Case of Greek-Orthodox Minority of Türkiye**

The international status of the Greek-Orthodox Minority of Türkiye (Minority) was established one century ago by the Lausanne Treaty (L.T.) of 24/7/1923 which was mentioned under Section III on the “Protection of Minorities”. The Minority was exempted by the infamous “Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations” which is a black spot in human history since it was the first time in the history, under the League of Nations, where the obligatory expatriation on massive scale of some 1.250.000 Christian-Orthodox from Türkiye were exchanged with some 400.000 Muslims from Greece.

Following the signing of the Lausanne Treaty the Greek-Orthodox minority population which remained in Türkiye was 135.000 living in Istanbul and the Aegean Sea islands of Gökceada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos). Today this population is less than 1.500 predominantly elderly people. This enormous population erosion happened because subsequent governments of Türkiye throughout the 1923-2003 period, pursued a systematic policy of severe discriminatory measures to force the expatriation of the members of the Minority.

### **Amongst the Most Severe Anti-Minority Measures:**

- (1) All the articles on the civil rights and functioning of the welfare foundations foreseen in the articles 38-44 of L.T. were violated despite the article 37 of the same Treaty which foresees: “Turkey undertakes that the stipulations contained in Articles 38 to 44 shall be recognized as fundamental laws, and that no law, no regulation, nor official action shall conflict or interfere with these stipulations, nor shall any law, regulation, nor official action prevail over them”.
- (2) In May 1941 all the members of the non-Muslim of minorities aged 18-45 years old, were sent to labor camps under terrible conditions on the pretext of a secret decree. They were released after 18 months.
- (3) In November 1942 a law passed from the single party parliament for all citizens to immediately pay, a Capital Tax due to the war situation around Türkiye. However, in the implementation of this law it became obvious that this Tax was aimed at the destruction of the minorities. This was admitted later by the chief Tax Officer Faik Ökte of Istanbul in his book published in 1954.
- (4) Despite the fact that Türkiye became founding member of the U.N. and endorsed all Human Rights Legislations including, as early as 1954, the ECHR (Rome), the Minority suffered a mass scale Pogrom on the night of 6-7 September 1955 which has been characterized as the worst mass scale Pogrom in post W.W. II European history. Until today the real perpetrators have not been disclosed officially. However, “Gladio” type organization involvement as was admitted by several retired officials.
- (5) In 1962 a “Special Committee on Minorities” was established by the Prime Minister’s Office of Türkiye whose members had nothing to do with minority issues but were selected from the security and secret services. The rulings of this Committee, which was abolished in 2004 by the present government, had authoritarian power above all other legislative, administrative, and judicial authorities. Examples of practices of this Committee:
  - a) The closure of the Minority schools in the two islands of Gökceada and Bozcaada (1964),
  - b) On the island of Gökceada: appropriation of the two cultivation fields of the island thus depriving the economic means of survival for the Minority and establishing an open criminal’s prison creating unbearable living conditions to the Minority and prohibiting the export of goods to mainland of Türkiye.

- c) The organization of the mass scale deportation of exempted from population exchange Istanbul Greek-orthodox Minority members in 1964-65 as mentioned in section 6 below.
  - d) In the Greek Schools of Istanbul unfairly dismissing many Minority teachers, stripping any sign of cultural heritage of the Minority in the school buildings and the expulsion of 20% of the students from Greek schools of Istanbul (1968-74) on the pretext that their grandparents' identity certificate displayed a birthplace located in Albania during the Ottoman era.
  - e) The repressive measures towards the Greek-Orthodox Minority welfare foundations as mentioned in section 7 below.
  - f) The planning of a boycott campaign (April 1964) against the Greek-Orthodox Minority shops which was implemented by the University student associations.
- (6) Even though during the Lausanne Treaty discussions the Turkish representation admitted openly, and this was later recorded in the L.T. text under the section of the Exchange of Turkish-Greek populations, the Greek-Orthodox Minority was to be exempted from the Exchange regardless of whether a member holds citizenship of Türkiye or Greece, two discriminatory measures were implemented:
- a) In June 1932 while the relations between Greece and Türkiye were excellent, 20 professions of Minority members holding Greek citizenship were prohibited leading to the expatriation of 12.000 Minority members.
  - b) On 16 March 1964 the Government of Türkiye declared the 12.500 Minority members holding citizenship of Greece, as "Harmful Elements" and started to deport them en masse. This process was continued for 12 months and in parallel with a secret decree dated November 1964 their property was confiscated. As a result of this general repressive environment the Minority population dropped from 90.000 in 1962 to 30.000 in 1966. In the years to come the continuation of anti-minority measures eroded the Minority population to 15.000 in 1974 and 5.000 in 2000.
- (7) In 1974 the Higher Appropriation Court of Türkiye based on the justification that "although the members of the minorities under the Lausanne Treaty are citizen of Türkiye they are also foreigners" and therefore the minority welfare foundations cannot acquire new real estate properties following the registrations of their properties which took place in the year 1936. Based on this Ruling 1.200 properties of the Minority were confiscated by the state. During this time 24 Greek-Orthodox Welfare Foundation (94 in total) administrations were transferred to the State General Directorate of Welfare Foundations.
- (8) Türkiye refused to recognize the legal status of the Ecumenical Patriarchate since 1923. Throughout the period of 1923-2003, excluding some exception periods, it displayed hostility towards this 1.700-year-old institution. The Ecumenical patriarchate as a Church institution, is considered as the first among equals of all Christian Orthodox Churches.

Following the elections in 2003 the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power and in the years to come it presented a different and positive attitude towards the minorities. The most important examples of this change of attitude were:

1. The "Special Committee on Minorities" was abolished in 2004 and the situation improved both in Istanbul and Gökceada despite the fact the Minority population was less than 2% of the one that it would have been, had it not been for the discriminatory measures mentioned above.
2. There attitude towards the Minority and the Ecumenical Patriarchate changed positively.
3. Through a law passed in 2008, part of the confiscated real estate properties was returned to their legal owners. However, the rate of returned properties was about 25%.

4. After a 15-year delay, elections took place in the Minority Welfare Foundations in 2007 and 2011, except for the largest and most wealthy Greek-Orthodox Balikli Hospital which also includes an old people's home. No elections have taken place in Balikli Foundation for the last 32 years. Then Elections were allowed only in 2022.
5. The first time since 1923 the State institutions provided financial support to the Minority Foundations and to the Social Solidarity Program of EFC (2018-2020) for the expatriated members of Minority.

In 2010 the Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans (EFC) being the union of the whole of the expatriated Greek-Orthodox Minority of Istanbul representing the 98% of the Minority population, appealed to the Prime Minister of Türkiye Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan and during the meeting with him in person mentioned the followings:

1. Recognized the positive change of attitude of his administration towards the Minority.
2. Proposed measures to support the Minority Schools which partly were realized with cooperation of Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans (EFC) and authorities of Türkiye
3. The necessity Türkiye to take remedy measures based on the principles of U.N. Gen.Assem.Res. 60/147 and for the repatriation of members of the younger generation of the expatriated Minority which is the only measure to prevent the complete disappearance of the Minority in Istanbul.

Despite some of the above positive developments, the main issue being faced by the Minority is the population which currently stands at 1.000 persons and if nothing happens during the next 10-year time period it will be depleted to 200 persons. Throughout the years 2010-2023, Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans (EFC) took several initiatives to facilitate repatriation but unfortunately there has been no response by the Türkiye especially in reinstatement of the citizenships to young generations which is highly necessary for the survival of the Minority.

Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans (EFC) asks from Türkiye to support the REPATRIATION PROGRAM which was submitted several times during the past 10 years.

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