



Drama, 16<sup>th</sup> of July 2020

Reference No: 11351

To: the Directors of the

UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs

Dear UNESCO Chair Director,

UNESCO, as the largest International Organization for Education, Science, and Culture, is the custodian of World Heritage of both natural beauty and cultural value. That is why UNESCO has created the World Heritage List, which has been updated constantly for decades. The List has included, since 1985, the Hagia Sophia as a landmark of the Byzantine Empire and civilization. This monument is a marvel of architecture and engineering and is considered one of the oldest and most impressive temples in the world, having a history of 15 centuries.

Under its museum status, the monument has been admired daily by visitors from all over the world, who belong to all dogmas and religions. It has been a symbol of unity not only for Christians and Muslims, but for all peoples, religions and cultures.

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Turkey's recent decision to turn the Hagia Sophia into a mosque brings us face-to-face with two facts:

- a) This country blatantly violated the UNESCO 1972 "Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage". The status of the Hagia Sophia was changed arbitrarily and unilaterally, without prior discussion.
- b) Under this change of status, the Hagia Sophia acquires the character of a religious temple only for Muslims, eliminating thus its ecumenical character as a cultural heritage monument and as an Orthodox temple, for many centuries.

In this context, the President of the International Hellenic University and the Director of its UNESCO Chair, located a few hundred Kilometers far from Hagia Sophia, we address you fellow Chairholders from all over the world, people who serve Science, Peace and Culture, and we ask you to condemn the violation of the 1972 UNESCO Convention by Turkey, as well as the resulting downfall of the outstanding Universal Value of the Hagia Sophia.

Sincerely yours,



Prof. em. Dr. Athanassios Kaissis  
President of Governing Board  
of International Hellenic University

A handwritten signature in blue ink, corresponding to Prof. em. Dr. Athanassios Kaissis.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, corresponding to Prof. Dimitrios Emmanouloudis.

Prof. Dimitrios Emmanouloudis  
Director of UNESCO Chair Con – E – Ect  
International Hellenic University