WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Center for Islamic Pluralism, a moderate Muslim think tank based in Washington which was established in 2004 to challenge "the dominance of American Muslim life by militant Islamist groups," issued a multi-religious statement this past Monday, October 3, for Ramadan and Rosh Hashanah which includes a plea to Turkish authorities on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople.

Among other things, the statement calls upon the Turkish Government to grant its Greek Orthodox and other Christian minorities the genuine right to practice and observe their cultural and religious way of life in Turkey; to allow the Ecumenical Patriarchate to function without obstruction; and to permit Pope Benedict to freely visit with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. The text of the statement follows below:

"The Center for Islamic Pluralism welcomes with great joy the arrival of the blessed month of Ramadan, and wishes to all Muslims around the world Ramadan mubarak: an easy fast, the opening of calendars, let us read our Qur'an al-Qerim, Let us read the Torah, and will conclude with a coin- "Finally, we note that, while the Muslim country of Turkey has been granted a step toward entry into the European Community, it is a source of comfort to Jews that, at the same time that a political state in Ankara continues to obstruct the proper functioning of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Christians. At the blessed time of Ramadan, which will conclude with a celebration of the mercy and compassion of almighty Allah, our hearts are heavy because of the injustice practiced by Turkish authorities against the Orthodox Christian community. We call upon the Turkish Government to open the Ecumenical Patriarchate to re-open its educational enterprises, and to function as the Patriarch sees fit for the religious well-being of the Orthodox faithful. "We also call on Turkish authorities to welcome, without any restrictions or impediments, the proposed visit by the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, Benedict XVI, to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Istanbul. Such an encounter will advance appropriate dialogue between all monotheistic believers (see www.islamicpluralism.org)."

**Patriarchal Activities**

In a related development, the Ecumenical Patriarch received Undersecretary of State for Diplomacy & Public Affairs Karen Hughes, Romanian President Traian Basescu and Prefect of Thessaloniki Panagiottis Psomiades during separate meetings at the Patriarchate last Thursday, September 29.

During their meeting, Bartholomew and Undersecretary Hughes discussed the importance of religious freedom and the significant role the reopening of the Theological School at Halki (which was forcibly shut down by the Turks in 1971) has to play in the future of the Church.

Mrs. Hughes, serving as envoy of President Bush, said she was always moved and strengthened by the fact that the Hellenic Republic’s elected officials, regardless of their political orientation and affiliation, invariably felt and expressed the same sentiments toward and convictions about "the center of the Orthodox faith, the Ecumenical Patriarchate."

Psomiades added that the Greek nation’s continued support "is a source from which we draw strength and courage to continue our difficult struggle, not just to survive, but also to continue our history, our traditions, our heritage and the Christian presence and testimony in the city of our fathers."

Mr. Psomiades stressed that the Patriarch had the Prefecture’s “full support in his heavy and difficult work at all times.”

The Patriarch thanked Mr. Psomiades for his kindness and said he was always moved and strengthened by the fact that the Hellenic Republic’s elected officials, regardless of their political orientation and affiliation, invariably felt and expressed the same sentiments toward and convictions about "the center of the Orthodox faith, the Ecumenical Patriarchate."

Bartholomew added that the Greek nation’s continued support "is a source from which we draw strength and courage to continue our difficult struggle, not just to survive, but also to continue our history, our traditions, our heritage and the Christian presence and testimony in the city of our fathers."