

# Islamic Moderates Call on Turkey to Ease Up on Patriarchate

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 opportunity for regular prayer, and reading of Qur'an al-Qerim. Let us work for the improvement of our ummah, and for unity on the straight path of moderation. In particular, we are outraged that the coming of Ramadan this year should be stained by the blood of innocent victims in Bali, as well as by continuing terrorism in Iraq and



EUROKINISSI

**His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople with U.S. Undersecretary of State for Diplomacy & Public Affairs Karen Hughes, left, during their recent meeting at the Patriarchate last week.**

elsewhere.

"We further note that, by a coincidence of calendars, the commencement of our holy month comes at the same time that the House of Israel celebrates the beginning of their year, Rosh Hashanah. We wish to all Jewish believers shanah tova, a blessed year, with the best of rewards for their adherence to Torah, and peace and understanding between

our faith communities.

"Finally, we note that, while the Muslim country of Turkey has been granted a step toward entry into the European Community, the 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 allow the Ecumenical Patriarchate to reopen its educational enterprises, and to function as the Patriarch sees fit for the religious wellbeing of the Orthodox faithful.

"We also call on Turkish au-

thorities 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](http://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 Panagiotis 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 honored to meet with the Patriarch.

During his meeting with Mr. Basescu, who was in Turkey on an official visit at the invitation of Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, the Patriarch discussed issues related to Orthodoxy in Europe. The Romanian President said that the Orthodox Church could help his country make significant progress towards joining the

European Union. The two also discussed the role the world's various religions play in global affairs.

According to Mr. Basescu, Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Islam and Buddhism can all help achieve world peace since the Church, as an institution, is considered more trustworthy than politicians. While he was in Constantinople, the Romanian President also went to Church of Hagia Sofia after meeting with Bartholomew.

The Patriarch also welcomed Mr. Psomiades during the latter's visit to Constantinople as head of a delegation representing the Thessaloniki Prefecture Council.

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."

