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JOINT RESOLUTION MEMORIALIZING THE GOVERNMENT OF TURKEY TO UPHOLD AND SAFEGUARD RELIGIOUS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

WE, your Memorialists, the Members of the One Hundred and Twenty-fourth Legislature of the State of Maine now assembled in the First Regular Session, most respectfully present and petition the Government of Turkey, as follows:

WHEREAS, the Orthodox Christian Church, in existence for nearly 2,000 years, numbers approximately 300 million members worldwide with more than 2 million members in the United States; and

WHEREAS, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, located in Istanbul, Turkey, is the Sacred See that presides in a spirit of brotherhood over a communion of self-governing churches of the Orthodox Christian world and the See is led by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who is the 269th in direct succession to the Apostle Andrew and holds titular primacy, as *primus inter pares*, meaning "first among equals," in the community of Orthodox churches worldwide; and

WHEREAS, in 1994, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, along with leaders of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, cosponsored the Conference on Peace and Tolerance, which brought together Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious leaders for an interfaith dialogue to help end the Balkan conflict and the ethnic conflict in the Caucasus region; and

WHEREAS, in 1997, the Congress of the United States awarded Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew the Congressional Gold Medal and, following the terrorist attacks on our nation on September 11, 2001, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew gathered a group of international religious leaders to produce the first joint statement with Muslim leaders that condemned the 9/11 attacks as "antireligious"; and

WHEREAS, in October 2005, the Ecumenical Patriarch, along with Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders, cosponsored the Conference on Peace and Tolerance II to further promote peace and stability in southeastern Europe, the Caucasus region and Central Asia via religious leaders' interfaith dialogue, understanding and action; and

WHEREAS, since 1453, the continuing presence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Turkey has been a living testament to the religious coexistence of Christians and Muslims and this religious coexistence is in jeopardy because the Ecumenical Patriarchate is considered a minority religion by the Turkish government; and

WHEREAS, the Government of Turkey has limited the candidates available to hold the office of Ecumenical Patriarch to only Turkish nationals, and from the millions of Orthodox Christians living in Turkey at the turn of the 20th century, due to the continued policies during this period by the Turkish government, there remain fewer than 3,000 of the Ecumenical Patriarch's flock left in Turkey today; and

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WHEREAS, the Government of Turkey closed the Theological School on the island of Halki in 1971 and has refused to allow it to reopen, thus impeding training for Orthodox Christian clergy and the Government of Turkey has confiscated nearly 94 percent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's properties and has placed a 42% tax, retroactive to 1999, on the Baloukli Hospital and Home for the Aged, a charity hospital run by the Ecumenical Patriarchate; and

WHEREAS, the European Union, a group of nations with a common goal of promoting peace and the well-being of its peoples, began accession negotiations with Turkey on October 3, 2005 and the European Union defined membership criteria for accession obligating candidate countries to achieve certain levels of reform, including stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, adherence to the rule of law and respect for and protection of minorities and human rights; and

WHEREAS, the Government of Turkey's current treatment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is inconsistent with the membership conditions and goals of the European Union, and Orthodox Christians in this State and throughout the United States stand to lose their spiritual leader because of the continued actions of the Government of Turkey; and

WHEREAS, the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Order of St. Andrew the Apostle, a group of laymen who each have been honored with a patriarchal title, or "offikion," by the Ecumenical Patriarch for outstanding service to the Orthodox Church, will send an American delegation to Turkey to meet with officials of the Government of Turkey, as well as the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, regarding the government's treatment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED: That We, your Memorialists, respectfully urge and request the Government of Turkey to uphold and safeguard religious and human rights without compromise, cease its discrimination against the Ecumenical Patriarchate, grant the Ecumenical Patriarch appropriate international recognition, ecclesiastic succession and the right to train clergy of all nationalities and respect the property rights and human rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate; and be it further

RESOLVED: That suitable copies of this resolution, duly authenticated by the Secretary of State, be transmitted to the President of the United States, the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, the Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the United States and to each Member of the Maine Congressional Delegation.