

113TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 4347

To require the Secretary of State to provide an annual report to Congress regarding United States Government efforts to survey and secure the return, protection, and restoration of stolen, confiscated, or otherwise unreturned Christian properties in the Republic of Turkey and in those areas currently occupied by the Turkish military in northern Cyprus.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 28, 2014

Mr. ROYCE (for himself and Mr. ENGEL) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

A BILL

To require the Secretary of State to provide an annual report to Congress regarding United States Government efforts to survey and secure the return, protection, and restoration of stolen, confiscated, or otherwise unreturned Christian properties in the Republic of Turkey and in those areas currently occupied by the Turkish military in northern Cyprus.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Turkey Christian
5 Churches Accountability Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 Congress finds the following:

3 (1) United States diplomatic leadership contrib-
4 utes meaningfully and materially to the protection
5 internationally of religious minorities and their faith-
6 based practices and places of worship.

7 (2) The International Religious Freedom Act of
8 1998 states that “It shall be the policy of the United
9 States to condemn violations of religious freedom,
10 and to promote, and to assist other governments in
11 the promotion of, the fundamental right to freedom
12 of religion.”.

13 (3) The House of Representatives, when it
14 adopted House Resolution 306 on December 13,
15 2011, called on the Secretary of State, in all official
16 contacts with Turkish leaders, to urge Turkey to
17 “allow the rightful church and lay owners of Chris-
18 tian church properties, without hindrance or restric-
19 tion, to organize and administer prayer services, reli-
20 gious education, clerical training, appointments, and
21 succession”, and to “return to their rightful owners
22 all Christian churches and other places of worship,
23 monasteries, schools, hospitals, monuments, relics,
24 holy sites, and other religious properties, including
25 movable properties, such as artwork, manuscripts,
26 vestments, vessels, and other artifacts”.

1 (4) On September 28, 2010, the House of Rep-
2 representatives adopted House Resolution 1631, calling
3 for the protection of religious sites and artifacts, as
4 well as for general respect for religious freedom in
5 Turkish-occupied areas of northern Cyprus.

6 (5) Christian churches and communities in the
7 Republic of Turkey and in the occupied areas of Cy-
8 prus continue to be prevented from fully practicing
9 their faith and face serious obstacles to reestab-
10 lishing full legal, administrative, and operational
11 control over stolen, expropriated, confiscated, or oth-
12 erwise unreturned churches and other religious prop-
13 erties and sites.

14 (6) In many cases the rightful Christian church
15 authorities, including relevant Holy Sees located out-
16 side Turkey and Turkish-occupied territories, are ob-
17 structed from safeguarding, repairing, or otherwise
18 caring for their holy sites upon their ancient home-
19 lands, because the properties have been destroyed,
20 expropriated, converted into mosques, storage facili-
21 ties, or museums, or subjected to deliberate neglect.

22 (7) While the Turkish Government has made
23 efforts in recent years to address these issues and to
24 return some church properties, much more must be
25 done to rectify the situation of Christian commu-

1 nities in these areas, as a vast majority of Christian
2 holy sites continue to be held by the Turkish Gov-
3 ernment or by third parties.

4 (8) On April 24, 2013, Catholicos Karekin II
5 and Catholicos Aram I, spiritual leaders of the mil-
6 lions of Christian Armenian faithful in Armenia and
7 the Diaspora, noted that Turkey continued to un-
8 justly “[retain] confiscated church estates and prop-
9 erties, and religious and cultural treasures of the Ar-
10 menian people”, and called on Turkey “[t]o imme-
11 diately return the Armenian churches, monasteries,
12 church properties, and spiritual and cultural treas-
13 ures, to the Armenian people as their rightful
14 owner”.

15 (9) The boundaries of Turkey encompass sig-
16 nificant historic Christian lands, including the bib-
17 lical lands of Armenia (present-day Anatolia), home
18 to many of early Christianity’s pivotal events and
19 holy sites, such as Mount Ararat, the location cited
20 in the Bible as the landing place of Noah’s Ark.

21 (10) These ancient territories were for thou-
22 sands of years home to a large, indigenous Christian
23 population, but, because of years of repressive Turk-
24 ish Government policies, historic atrocities, and bru-

1 tal persecution, today Christians constitute less than
2 one percent of Turkey’s population.

3 (11) As a result of the Turkish Government’s
4 invasion of the northern area of the Republic of Cy-
5 prus on July 20, 1974, and the Turkish military’s
6 continued illegal and discriminatory occupation of
7 portions of this sovereign state, the future and very
8 existence of Greek Cypriot, Maronite, and Armenian
9 communities are now in grave jeopardy.

10 (12) Under the Turkish occupation of northern
11 Cyprus, freedom of worship has been severely re-
12 stricted, access to religious sites blocked, religious
13 sites systematically destroyed, and a large number of
14 religious and archaeological objects illegally con-
15 fiscated or stolen.

16 (13) The United States Commission on Inter-
17 national Religious Freedom, in its 2012 annual re-
18 port, criticized “the Turkish government’s system-
19 atic and egregious limitations on the freedom of reli-
20 gion”, and warned that “[l]ongstanding policies con-
21 tinue to threaten the survivability and viability of
22 minority religious communities in Turkey”.

23 (14) Christian minorities in Turkey continue to
24 face discrimination, prohibitions on the training and
25 succession of clergy, and violent attacks, which have

1 at times resulted in lenient sentencing, including the
2 reduced sentence for the murderer of the Catholic
3 Church's head bishop in Turkey, Luigi Padovese, in
4 June 2010, or delayed justice, including the unre-
5 solved torture and murder, in April 2007, of three
6 employees of a Protestant Bible publishing house in
7 Malatya, Turkey.

8 (15) The Government of Turkey, in contraven-
9 tion of its international legal obligations, refuses to
10 recognize the 2,000-year-old Sacred See of the Ecu-
11 menical Patriarchate's international status, has con-
12 fiscated the large majority of the assets and prop-
13 erties of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Greek cul-
14 tural and educational foundations, maintains that
15 candidates for the position of Ecumenical Patriarch
16 must be Turkish citizens, and continues to refuse to
17 reopen the Theological School at Halki, thus imped-
18 ing training and succession for the Greek Orthodox
19 clergy in Turkey.

20 (16) The Government of Turkey, in contraven-
21 tion of its international legal obligations, continues
22 to place substantial restrictions and other limitations
23 upon the Armenian Patriarchate's right to train and
24 educate clergy and select and install successors with-
25 out government interference.

1 (17) Religious freedom is an essential corner-
2 stone of democracy that promotes respect for indi-
3 vidual liberty, which contributes to greater stability,
4 and is therefore a priority value for the United
5 States to promote in its engagement with other
6 countries.

7 **SEC. 3. REPORT REQUIREMENTS.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the
9 date of the enactment of this Act and annually thereafter
10 until 2021, the Secretary of State shall submit to the
11 Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representa-
12 tives and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Sen-
13 ate a report on the status and return of stolen, con-
14 fiscated, or otherwise unreturned Christian churches,
15 places of worship, and other properties in or from the Re-
16 public of Turkey and in the areas of northern Cyprus oc-
17 cupied by the Turkish military that shall contain the fol-
18 lowing:

19 (1) A comprehensive listing of all the Christian
20 churches, places of worship, and other properties,
21 such as monasteries, schools, hospitals, monuments,
22 relics, holy sites, and other religious properties, in-
23 cluding movable properties, such as artwork, manu-
24 scripts, vestments, vessels, and other artifacts, in or
25 from Turkey and in the territories of the Republic

1 of Cyprus under military occupation by Turkey that
2 are claimed as stolen, confiscated, or otherwise
3 wrongfully removed from the ownership of their
4 rightful Christian church owners.

5 (2) Description of all engagement over the pre-
6 vious year on this issue by officials of the Depart-
7 ment of State with representatives of the Republic
8 of Turkey regarding the return to their rightful own-
9 ers of all Christian churches, places of worship, and
10 other properties, such as monasteries, schools, hos-
11 pitals, monuments, relics, holy sites, and other reli-
12 gious properties, including movable properties, such
13 as artwork, manuscripts, vestments, vessels, and
14 other artifacts, both those located within Turkey's
15 borders and those under control of Turkish military
16 forces in the occupied northern areas of Cyprus.

17 (b) INCLUSION IN ANNUAL COUNTRY REPORTS ON
18 HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES AND INTERNATIONAL RELI-
19 GIOUS FREEDOM REPORT.—The information required
20 under subsection (a) shall be summarized in the annual
21 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and Inter-
22 national Religious Freedom Reports.

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