



UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE  
FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON  
April 27, 2007

Dear Mr. Larigakis:

Thank you for your letter to Secretary Rice regarding your trip to Istanbul as one of the American Archons witnessing Pope Benedict XVI's meeting with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholemew. The Secretary has asked that I reply on her behalf, and I wish to apologize for the delay. We are sorry to hear that you experienced difficulties during your trip and have conveyed your concerns to Turkish authorities.

The visit of the Pope to Istanbul and his meeting with the Patriarch were historic events of immense religious importance worldwide. Turkish authorities focused on preventing any possible threat to the Pope, the Patriarch, or the thousands of pilgrims who accompanied them. The recent murder of Hrant Dink is tragic proof of the necessity of such precautions. As a consequence, many people, Turks and foreign visitors alike, were inconvenienced by the security arrangements, and individuals of all nationalities attending the services were asked to surrender their passports.

Nevertheless, the difficulties the Archons experienced during the events at the Ecumenical Patriarchate were extraordinary and regrettable. Our staff at the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul responded immediately once they were alerted to the serious inconvenience caused by security barriers outside the Patriarchate. They worked with the Istanbul Governor's office to allow the buses to approach the Patriarchate. I understand that this problem did not recur after the first day the Archons encountered these hardships. I am proud of the work our Consulate's staff did to resolve many other problems as they arose, and I appreciated your expression of gratitude at the time to our Consul General, Deborah Jones.

Mr. Nick Larigakis,  
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As you know, the United States strongly supports the rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. We continue to urge the Turkish government to allow the Ecumenical Patriarchate to operate freely and encourage measures such as the re-opening of Halki Seminary and protecting Patriarchate property from spurious and unjust claims.

I hope that the rest of the visit went smoothly and that you were able to enjoy participating in this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Sincerely,



R. Nicholas Burns