

NCWA DEMANDS PROTECTION OF ARMENIAN HERITAGE SITES

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On the occasion of the World Heritage Committee conference organized by UNESCO and hosted by Turkey, Souren Seraydarian, chairperson of the National Congress of Western Armenians, sent (July 12, 2016) the below letter to Turkey's minister of culture and tourism pointing out Turkey's international obligation to protect Armenian cultural heritage in Turkey.--Editor.

To: **The Minister of Culture and Tourism of Turkey**

From: **National Congress of Western Armenians**

34 avenue de Champs-Élysées, 75008 Paris, France

Dear Minister,

The National Congress of Western Armenians (le Congrès National des Arméniens Occidentaux), an NGO based in Paris, took note with appreciation the holding of the conference of the World Heritage Committee organized by UNESCO and hosted by the Government of Turkey.

As an organization dedicated to the protection and maintenance of the interests of the heirs of the Armenians that populated the Ottoman Empire, which are now spread all over the world, the National Congress of Western Armenians puts a special emphasis on the importance of maintaining and protecting the cultural heritage of national minorities that lived and still live on the territory of the Republic of Turkey.

We believe that the Republic of Turkey must be conscious of the multitude of cultures and civilizations that grew and developed over millenarities Asia Minor and values its international commitments, including the protection of cultural heritage located on its territory.

We hereby refer to the obligations under international legal instruments that raise serious concerns related to the Armenian cultural heritage. One such instrument is the Treaty of Peace signed at Lausanne – an instrument, which lies at the heart of the modern Republic of Turkey. Article 42, paragraph, 3 of the said instrument provides as follows:

The Turkish Government undertakes to grant full protection to the churches, synagogues, cemeteries, and other religious establishments of the above-mentioned minorities. All facilities and authorization will be granted to the pious foundations, and to the religious and charitable institutions of the said minorities at present existing in Turkey, and the Turkish Government will not refuse, for the formation of new religious and charitable institutions, any of the necessary facilities which are guaranteed to other private institutions of that nature.

The Republic of Turkey is also a party to a series of universal legal instruments that touch upon the matter of the protection of cultural heritage. Thus, Article 4 of the Convention concerning the

Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 16 November 1972, to which Turkey is a signatory party, provides as follows:

Each State Party to this Convention recognizes that the duty of ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage referred to in Articles 1 and 2 and situated on its territory, belongs primarily to that State. It will do all it can to this end, to the utmost of its own resources and, where appropriate, with any international assistance and co-operation, in particular, financial, artistic, scientific and technical, which it may be able to obtain.

With reference to the said and other international obligations, which form the core of contemporary human values, we call upon the Government of the Republic of Turkey to take immediate measures to stop the destruction and spoling of the Armenian cultural heritage located on the territory of Turkey.



Ruins of city of Ani

We believe that as a first step, the Government should undertake to secure the Armenian churches, monasteries, castles, cemeteries and city walls from further destruction and using the recuperated material for private and communal purposes.

The further step should be the preservation and restoration of the ruins of Ani and the Monastery of St. Garabet (Çanlı Kilise), while maintaining the original design and the form of the said structures which form part of not only Armenian, but human heritage in general.

We would like to emphasize that the issue of St. Garabet has already been raised previously. It was yet in 2012 and later in May 2015 that Aziz Dagci, the president of the NGO "Union of Social Solidarity and Culture for Bitlis, Batman, Mush and Sasun" appealed to the Turkish ministries of Culture and Interior requesting the reconstruction of the St. Garabet Monastery in accordance with the provisions of the Lausanne Treaty.

We believe that the Republic of Turkey, as a member of the international community, should act in accordance with its international obligations and respect its shared past by maintaining the historical monuments that are located on its territory, no matter by whose hands those were built.

Your attention and involvement in the present matter would be highly appreciated.

Yours Sincerely,

Souren Seraydarian
NCWA Chairperson

