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LETTER DATED 7 OCTOBER 1965 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF TURKEY
ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

In his letter dated 29 September 1965 (S/5725), addressed to Your Excellency, the Permanent Representative of Greece has endeavoured to attribute an international character to a case of litigation regarding the ownership of two church buildings pending before the appropriate civil court of Istanbul. The litigants are the Turkish and the Greek Orthodox Churches of Istanbul both of which claim ownership of the buildings under dispute. This being the case, the Government of Turkey does not find itself in a position to express an opinion about or interfere in a matter which is sub judice. It is highly regrettable that the Government of Greece has chosen to disregard this universally respected legal principle.

The Government of Turkey would have been more than happy had the Greek authorities practised the same tolerance towards its citizens of Turkish origin who adhere to the Muslim faith. Unfortunately this has not been the case. The Greek Government has, as a matter of policy, continually interfered in the religious affairs of the Turkish minority in Greece, keeping them under pressure without any justification. For example, since 1947 when the Dodecanese Islands were annexed to Greece after the Second World War, the Greek Government had seized three mosques named "Enderun", "Piyolettin Fasha" and "Kadi" on the island of Rhodes and converted them into churches. Six other places of worship for the Turkish inhabitants of the island were arbitrarily closed and the buildings turned over to the local Greek Archeological Office.

In Western Thrace, adjacent to Turkey, the freedom of worship of the Turkish minority has been restricted in such a provocative manner that the Turkish community has not been able to elect a Müfti (religious leader) for years. Neither have the Turkish mosques been spared from arson, pillage and destruction. On the night of 21 August 1964, the Turkish mosque in down-town Iskeçe was made the target of a Greek assault during which a bomb was thrown into the mosque. Last month another Turkish mosque in the village of "Yassıköy", only a few miles from Iskeçe,

was blown up and damaged. To add insult to injury, the Greek Government arrested a most prominent and popular Turk, Mr. Niyazi, who is the Chairman of the Religious Foundation of the village, in an effort to frame him with the responsibility for this sacrilegious Greek attempt.

If further evidence of this Greek religious intolerance were needed it can be found in the abusive language employed by the Permanent Representative of Greece in his violent attack on the Turkish Orthodox Church of Istanbul. It is impossible for the Turkish Government to comprehend the peculiar logic of Ambassador Liatis which seeks to deny to the Turkish citizens of Orthodox faith the right to have their own independent church. Turkey is a secular State and the Turkish citizens are entitled to adhere to any faith of their own choosing and practise this faith in any church, mosque or other place of worship, so long as such practice does not infringe upon public interest. This will continue to be so whether the Permanent Representative of Greece approves of it or not.

The tendentious statement of the Permanent Representative of Greece to the effect that the Turkish Government is bent on eroding the position of the Patriarchate is totally untenable. In this respect we can do no more than reiterate our previous statement, quoted also by the Permanent Representative of Greece, that the Patriarchate and the person of the Ecumenical Patriarch and other personnel will enjoy the protection of law accorded to all citizens of Turkey, in addition to the traditional reverence enjoyed by all religious dignitaries.

Contrary to the assertions of the Permanent Representative of Greece, which are motivated by political considerations, the above statement of the Government of Turkey is supported by 512 years of unimpeded existence and functioning enjoyed by the Patriarchate.

The Turkish Government is firmly determined to keep religious affairs outside politics. The Government of Greece would do well to follow this example and abandon its practice of using religious institutions for the furtherance of its policy of Greek expansionism.

I would be obliged if Your Excellency would be kind enough to have the text of this letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

Please accept, etc.

(Signed) Orhan ERALP
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of
Turkey to the United Nations