

ICOM and ICOMOS Joint Statement on Hagia Sophia (Istanbul, Turkey)



Along with the international community, ICOM and ICOMOS jointly express their concerns regarding the decision by the Turkish authorities to reverse the status of Hagia Sophia from a museum to a mosque, and the repercussions this may have in terms of the conservation and accessibility of this outstanding artistic and cultural heritage.

Since 1934, Hagia Sophia has been a museum, a decision motivated as a symbolic gesture to openly present to the public the spectacular multi-layered cultural richness of this monument. The Turkish people and tourists from all over the world have since then had the opportunity to visit this architectural masterpiece and contemplate its stunning works of art of the Byzantine and Ottoman periods, an intercultural exchange inscribed in the museum's DNA.

ICOM has been advocating for decades the role of museums as meeting places open to all people without distinction, a creative space where people can engage with cultural heritage in all its dimensions, connecting past, present and future.

Alberto Garlandini, ICOM President

ICOMOS hopes that the artistic works representing all the cultural layers of Hagia Sophia will continue to be accessible side by side, as has been possible since the creation of the museum in 1934.

Toshiyuki Kono, ICOMOS President

The importance of this shared heritage was strengthened with the inscription of the monument on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1985, and the commitments this entails for Turkey as a State Party. It recognizes Hagia Sophia's role as an irreplaceable testimony of a multicultural past and the continuing dialogue between cultures – a monument that has stood the test of time for the benefit of the present and future generations. ICOM and ICOMOS share the opinion that conservation and accessibility must continue to be at the heart of the management of Hagia Sophia, regardless of its future function and jurisdiction.

While functioning as a museum, Hagia Sophia also served as a place for education and research, benefiting from the exchange of knowledge between curators, scholars and specialists. The continuous discussions gathering Turkish and international experts certainly enrich the understanding of the monument and support the conservation efforts to mitigate the effects of time on the structure. The discussions among experts must also continue especially to ensure the future care of Hagia Sophia in every aspect of its preservation.

ICOM expresses its hope that Hagia Sofia's function as a museum will continue, emphasizing the importance of its preservation and continued accessibility to the public and experts.

Peter Keller, ICOM Director General

The Hagia Sophia's presentation, intact with all its layers, should not be obstructed, so this magnificent monument of world architectural history can keep inspiring us all as a symbol of interfaith brotherhood and world peace.

ICOMOS Turkey

For these reasons, ICOM and ICOMOS, and their respective committees which have already expressed their sadness to see this symbolic monument losing its museum status, concur with the statements made by partner organisations such as [UNESCO](#) as well as the [academic community](#).

Paris, 15 July 2020