



## International Pressure Forces Turkey to Again Delay Assyrian Monastery Trial

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(AINA) -- [AINA's reporting](#) on the threats against St. Gabriel Syriac-Orthodox Monastery has led to strong international reactions. Facing intense international pressure, Turkey has rescheduled the hearing on the St. Gabriel for the second time in thirty days. The hearing on January 16 to address the issue of a wall the monastery built was rescheduled for February 11, the same date that the court is scheduled to determine if 270 hectares that were confiscated by the government belong to the monastery.

150 observers attended the [previous hearing](#), on December 19, including European Parliament members and representatives of Assyrian organizations from throughout Europe. The EU was officially represented by Helena Storm, from the Swedish embassy in Turkey. A large delegation from Sweden was led by Parliament members Mats Petroff, Yilmaz Kerimo, and Kerstin Lundgren (click [here](#) for background information on the case).

A Turkish official interviewed by AINA, who wishes to remain anonymous, stated the threats against St. Gabriel are a challenge for Turkey and it's struggle for democracy:



The situation is very awkward for Turkey. The state could not prepare evidence showing that the confiscated lands do not belong to the Monastery. The court is being delayed since the judge asked the state to come back with detailed information. This is becoming a struggle of power and the state will loose, though they don't want to do it with shame. AINA's article [The Turkish State and The Assyrian Monastery](#) shows how shameful this was from the start. I hope it will end soon. We could not stop the persecution and killings of other Christians in our country but now we have a chance to show the world that we are serious with democracy for all parts of Turkey, no matter what religion or ethnicity.

Nina Shea, Director of the Center for Religious Freedom, Hudson Institute, remarks that this case presents an interesting window into what's happening to Turkey under the Justice and Development Party: "An ideology of extreme intolerance is sweeping the Muslim world today. Even moderate Western allies, such as Turkey and Iraq, have turned an unwelcoming, indeed hostile, face to the Christians and other non-Muslims in their midst and driving them out. This is a problem, not only for the ancient churches but for Western geopolitics. It is an ideology of religious intolerance that undergirds jihadism. All of our leaders -- East and West -- need to recognize this and work to end it."

Catherine Cosman, Senior Policy Analyst at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, noted that the case was significant and the "...information helpful as background in trying to better understand that complex situation," and "will assist the staff in drafting whatever materials on Turkey the Commission decides to include in future reports on that country."

The Assyrian American National Federation released a strongly worded statement (AINA [1-20-2009](#)) calling on Turkey to "...lead the region by example and safeguard the values of freedom, democracy, tolerance and justice."

Reaction also came from Turkey's capital Ankara. Sema Kilicer, the political officer in charge of human rights at the EU Commission Office in Ankara, said: "the EU is monitoring the St. Gabriel case as this is important political criteria for Turkey's EU accession process."