

# Syrian Christians Respond to Erdogan's Neo-Ottoman Agenda

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Theme: [History](#), [Religion](#)

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*The steadfast city of Al Sqeilbiyyeh responds strongly to the move of neo-Ottoman would-be-Emperor, Erdogan, to convert the historic church of Hagia Sophia from a secular, inclusive museum into a Mosque.*

According to Turkish media (Hurriyet) changes will be applied immediately to the 1500 year old World Heritage building. The holy Christian icons and mosaics may be covered to make way for Muslim prayer, the first will be on Friday 24th July.



The legendary icons include a mosaic made in the 9th or 10th century featuring a seated Jesus holding a book with the words "Peace be with you. I am the light of the world." There is also a mosaic of Jesus dating back to 1261.

"In 1934, under the rule of the founder of modern Turkey, Kemal Ataturk, Hagia Sophia became a museum. Since Ataturk's conversion of the building it has been a symbol of secular Turkey and religious coexistence."

The Syrian Christian Orthodox city of Al Sqeilbiyyeh in northern Hama is responding with resistance against this attack on the secular co-existence that is now threatened by Erdogan's neo-Ottoman ambitions.

Image on the right: Nabel Alabdalla. (Photo: Vanessa Beeley)



The city of Al Sqeilbiyyeh resisted the sectarian extremism that attempted to wipe Christianity from the map of Syria and the region, for ten long years. All members of this resilient community have upheld the pluralist culture of their nation and of their President Bashar Al Assad and they will not allow the same sectarian supremacist agenda to destabilise the region any further.

Nabel Alabdalla, the commander of the National Defence Forces is proposing an initiative to build a symbolic scaled down version of the church in defiance of Erdogan's decision and to name it after Hagia Sophia. The cornerstone for the church will be laid in Sqeilbiyyeh with the blessings of the Bishop of Hama, Nicola Baalbaki.

Erdogan and his extremist proxies in Syria and throughout the region threaten Christianity

with extinction in the Middle East. Syria is the birthplace of Christianity and Nabel has taken this decision because of his profound love for his President, his homeland, its history and its diverse, multi-faith tapestry which must be defended and protected at all costs. The sacrifices of the martyrs and those injured fighting for justice should not be in vain.



Al Sqeilbiyyeh June 2020 (Photo: Vanessa Beeley)

Syria. The cradle of Humanity and the heart of resistance.

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