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**DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**  
**ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

**Statement**

**On the Attempted Expropriation of the Armenian Church St.Giragos  
delivered by Ambassador Arman Kirakossian at the 1096th Meeting of the OSCE  
Permanent Council  
April 14, 2016**

Mr. Chairman,

Since there was a reference in the statement of the Russian Delegation to the human rights situation of minorities in the South East part of Turkey in the context of ongoing tensions, I would like to raise the issue of the Armenian religious property in Turkey.

There are reports on attempted expropriation by the state authorities of the Armenian Church St Giragos and its land property in Diyarbakir city. St. Giragos is the biggest Armenian medieval church in the Middle East that goes back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century and represents both religious and cultural heritage of Armenians. The Church was restored by the Armenian community with private donations of Armenians from all over the world and became symbol of reclaiming Armenian identity for many residents of Diyarbakir and Sur which was densely populated by the Armenians a century ago. On many occasions the Turkish authorities expressed the readiness to return to religious groups their religious property which was expropriated decades ago and accepted the relevant recommendations put forward by Armenia in the framework of the Universal Periodical Review of the UN Human Rights Council. Yet this recent development goes in completely reverse direction.

In our view security situation cannot be invoked in justifying the violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms particularly freedom of religion and faith which is firmly embedded in the OSCE principles and commitments.

Thank You.