Legate 12-23

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Caption: Archbishop Vizcken Aykazian, right, and the other members of the panel

Conference Seeks to Protect Sacred Sites

WASHINGTON — On December 6, Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, the Diocesan Legate and Ecumenical Director, took part in a special panel on “Sacred Sites and Property Rights” during the third international Conference on Religious Freedom.

Archbishop Aykazian was among the experts brought together to discuss the struggles of Christian communities across the Middle East to protect religious sites from state encroachment, and to secure their very survival under often hostile conditions. Aykazian noted by way of example that “the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem has 950 pieces of property in Constantinople and the surrounding region,” which it has been trying to get back from the Turkish authorities for the last ten years. He said that not even one of these confiscated church properties has yet been returned to the patriarchate.

Other speakers on the panel included Dr. Elizabeth Prodromou (of Tufts University’s Fletcher School of Diplomacy), Rabbi Arthur Schneier (Appeal of Conscience Foundation), Kate Nahapetian (Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights), and retired US Ambassador to Qatar Patrick Theros.

Also speaking at a different session of the conference was St. John’s University Law Professor (and St. Nersess Seminary board member) Mark Movsesian.

The conference, organized by the “Archons” of the Greek Orthodox Church—an association dedicated to the defense and preservation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in the face of persecution—took place in Washington, DC, December 4-6. The Archons operate under the spiritual direction of Archbishop Demetrios, Geron of the Greek Orthodox Church in America.