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ASIA/TURKEY – Restitution of lands to Syrian Orthodox Mor Gabriel Monastery completed

Mardin (Agenzia Fides) – The lands belonging to the ancient Monastery of Mor Gabriel, situated in the south-eastern Turkish province of Mardin, have at last been returned to the Syrian-Orthodox community to which the monastery belongs, as it was agreed last October by a Meeting of the Foundation, the highest deliberative body of a group which administer the goods of religious communities in Turkey . “The question, concerning 12 areas of land for a total 244,000 square meters” Kuryakos Ergun, head of the Mor Gabriel Foundation told Turkish media “has been settled. We are pleased to have retrieved the land without having to pass through a pronunciation of the European Court of Human Rights ”.
This restitution of land to the Mor Gabriel Monastery is the largest return of founding properties to church communities in the history of the Turkish Republic.
The land became the object of legal dispute in 2008, when they were confiscated and registered in the public land registry. At the time the monks announced a recourse to the European Commission for human rights. In 2012 Turkey’s supreme court of appeal rejected the recourse of the Syrian Foundation ordering the return of the confiscated land properties. Things began to move in 2013, when Turkish president Recep Tayyp Erdogan inserted the restitution of the Monastery’s lands in a “democratization packet” announced 30 September last year.
The Mor Gabriel Monastery founded in the year 397, stands on the Tur Abdin high plain and is the oldest Syrian-Orthodox monastery stil in activity.
Recently the Syrian-Orthodox community obtained government recognition of its right to open schools where the children of the community can be educated in the mother tongue.
“The restitution of the lands” said Kuryakos Ergun “will help protect the Monastery and enable it to freely resume its mission. This will have positive repercussions for the Syrian community”. According to Ergun, the positive conclusion of the matter may convince many Syrian Christians who have left Turkey, including those who moved to Syria, to return. 27/2/2014).

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