

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing on Human Rights in Turkish-Occupied Cyprus: Erdogan's Record and Its  
Implications for the Ankara NATO Summit

June 30, 2026 - 10:00 a.m.

2255 Rayburn House Office Building

Statement of H.E. Evangelos Savva  
Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus to the United States

Honorable Chairmen Smith and McGovern, distinguished Members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to offer some remarks today in the Hearing you have called on the human rights situation in the occupied areas of Cyprus by Turkey. I wish to commend you for this initiative, which also serves as a stark reminder of a five-decades long stain on the international system that emerged out of the horrors of World War Two and on the rules-based order often invoked by world leaders but, regrettably, as the case of Cyprus so very aptly demonstrates, only selectively.

What you will hear today from expert witnesses on the subject matter of this Hearing will, I am certain, both shock and horrify. On a wide range of human rights issues, the record is truly disgraceful. Allow me to enumerate them:

1. The continued displacement of almost 1/3 of the population of Cyprus;
2. The unabated illegal usurpation of the property rights of these displaced persons;
3. The almost daily harassment and intimidation of the enclaved population in the occupied areas;
4. The unresolved fate of the remaining 746 missing persons, a purely humanitarian issue which to this day remains a raw wound for their families;
5. The continued desecration and looting of cultural sites, including of churches and cemeteries;
6. The active policy of illegal settlement of the occupied areas, as a deliberate policy aimed at altering the demographic and cultural landscape of the island.

Testimonies that will be presented today analyze in depth these human rights abuses. On my part, what I would like to focus on is the political context, both in its national dimensions and the overall international setting and ramifications.

It ought to be obvious, in this regard, and it is, without a doubt, self-evident that the gross violations of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Cypriots, regardless of ethnic or religious background, are the direct result of the two phases of the Turkish military invasion in July and August of 1974 and subsequent, ongoing occupation of more than 36% of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus. I need not remind that both the military invasion and ongoing occupation made, and continue to make, a complete mockery of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Over the 52 years that have elapsed since the invasion, successive Turkish governments have, on the one hand, solidified the stifling control of Ankara over every single aspect of human endeavor in the area that their armed forces occupy, while on the other, staunchly refused to heed the repeated calls of the international community. The international community's will is expressed through numerous UN Security Council resolutions, for a settlement of the Cyprus Question which, and here I quote, "*must be based on a State of Cyprus with a single sovereignty and international personality and a single citizenship, with its independence and territorial integrity safeguarded, and comprising two politically equal communities as described in the relevant Security Council resolutions, in a bi-communal and bi-zonal federation, and that such a settlement must exclude union in whole or in part with any other country or any form of partition or secession*".

Adding salt to injury, Turkey proceeded in 1983 with a further illegal provocation by promoting the secessionist policy of an intransigent Turkish Cypriot leadership culminating with the illegal, unilateral declaration of a separate entity they called "the Turkish republic of northern Cyprus". Indicative of the unequivocal and widespread rejection of this was the fact that the UN Security Council strongly condemned it, "deploring the declaration", "considering it legally invalid and calling for its withdrawal" and "calling upon all States to respect the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus and not to recognize any Cypriot State other than the Republic of Cyprus".

Almost 43 years since then, not one state has gone against this call by the Security Council, which, in and of itself, is proof of the remarkable unity of the international community when it comes to the situation in Cyprus and what a settlement must be.

And yet, despite this crystal-clear position, Turkey refuses to bulge from its dead-end policy of maintaining by military force the artificial division it brutally perpetrated in Cyprus, of continuing to advocate for recognition of the so-called "TRNC", of denying the full enjoyment of all Cypriots' human rights and absurdly, of not recognizing the Republic of Cyprus.

I must here make special mention to the fact that successive US administrations have remained committed over the years to the framework of the solution as laid out by the Security Council and to the policy of non-recognition of the illegal secessionist entity in the occupied areas of Cyprus. This steadfast, principled position has been instrumental in properly addressing this long-standing issue, considering also the leading position of the United States globally and of course given its status as a permanent member of the Security Council.

Honorable Chairmen Smith and McGovern, distinguished Members of the Commission,

The NATO alliance will be gathering for a summit in Ankara in a few days, with the President of Turkey evidently eager and determined to make a show of his purported leadership. It is, therefore, more pertinent than ever to recall that in the preamble of The North Atlantic Treaty, it is stated that, and I quote, "*The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments. They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law*". It is indisputable that the host of next week's NATO summit is in direct conflict

with these lofty ideals, which one would expect to be absolutely binding on all NATO countries. Just as the Charter of the United Nations itself is binding on all its member-states.

I would like to conclude my remarks by underlining the fact that any and all human rights violations, wherever and whenever they occur, are by definition a subversion of justice. The people of Cyprus have exhibited great perseverance in the face of this 52-years long adversity, firm believers evidently in the maxim so eloquently articulated by Martin Luther King Jr., that “*The Arc of the Moral Universe is Long, but it Bends Toward Justice*”. Until the tragic results of the Turkish invasion of 1974 and the continued occupation are overturned by a settlement as proscribed by the Security Council, without foreign overlords, troops or intervention rights, and in line with the rules-based international system and the values of the European Union, to which the whole of Cyprus belongs, until then, we will continue to strive towards that justice.

Thank you.