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Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin

Question of Cyprus

Letter dated 21 January 2022 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 20 January 2022, addressed to you by Mehmet Dâna, Representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 10 and 44.

(Signed) Öncü Keçeli
Chargé d'affaires a.i.



Annex to the letter dated 21 January 2022 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing in response to the statement made by the Greek Cypriot representative, on 6 December 2021, at the meeting during the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly, on agenda item 10, entitled “Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin”, which once again blatantly distorted facts pertaining to Cyprus. As a matter of fact, the Greek Cypriot side has long been exploiting the absence of the Turkish Cypriot side at international platforms by misleading the international community about the Cyprus problem. Therefore, I am compelled to respond in writing in order to set the record straight.

The Greek Cypriot representatives have long been misinforming the international community by portraying the Cyprus problem as one of “occupation”. In fact, none of the Security Council resolutions on Cyprus describe the legitimate and justified Turkish presence on the island, in accordance with the 1960 international Cyprus treaties, as an “occupation”. Lest we forget, guarantor Turkey had to intervene after 11 years of Turkish Cypriot ordeal at the hands of the Greek Cypriots that culminated in the coup attempt organized by the military junta in Athens and its Greek Cypriot collaborators, aiming to annex the entire island to Greece (enosis) and total annihilation of the Turkish Cypriot people. It should be underlined that the Cyprus problem commenced in 1963, not in 1974, when the Greek Cypriot side forcibly usurped the title of the Republic of Cyprus partnership and expelled the Turkish Cypriot partner from all State organs. During the years from 1963 to 1974, a period that the Greek and Greek Cypriot representatives have conveniently chosen to ignore, the Greek Cypriots, aided and encouraged by Greece, took part in an ethnic cleansing campaign against Turkish Cypriots, known as the Akritas Plan, with the ultimate aim of achieving enosis. This large-scale violence and ensuing gross human rights violations necessitated that the Security Council deploy the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus in 1964 in order to stop the bloodshed and atrocities perpetrated against the Turkish Cypriot people. Given that there is a plethora of United Nations documents attesting to these crimes against humanity, the fact that there is no single reference thereto in the said statement is yet another testament to the fact that these remarks are not fact-based, but another episode of the well-known Greek Cypriot propaganda machinery.

The Greek Cypriot representative, who attempts to portray the Greek Cypriot administration as a champion of combating the illicit trafficking in cultural property and protecting cultural heritage, ironically turns a blind eye to the dire condition of Turkish-Islamic cultural heritage in South Cyprus. The Greek Cypriot administration, since 1963, has been pursuing a policy of eradicating all traces of the Turkish-Islamic heritage of Cyprus. During the period from 1963 to 1974, mosques, shrines and other holy sites in Turkish villages all around the island were destroyed by the Greek Cypriots. Field studies conducted by our experts and the information gathered from Turkish Cypriots visiting South Cyprus have indicated that there are more than 130 mosques in South Cyprus, a significant number of which are in extremely poor condition. Furthermore, all the movable cultural objects from these monuments, namely hundreds of manuscript Holy Qur’ans, prayer rugs, Holy Qur’an reading desks and pieces of Islamic iconography, have been destroyed or looted.

With regard to the allegations in relation to cultural and religious heritage in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, I would like to emphasize that the Turkish Cypriot side, despite its meagre resources, protects and preserves the cultural and religious heritage of the island of Cyprus, emanating from the diverse and rich cultures as well as civilizations that have populated the island throughout history. In

addition to its own efforts for the protection and preservation of cultural and religious heritage in its territory, irrespective of its origin, the Turkish Cypriot side has also been actively engaging in and contributing constructively to the work of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage, which stands as an outstanding example of what the two sides can accomplish through cooperation for the good of the two peoples.

Against this background, it is clear that the misleading remarks of the Greek Cypriot representative are not corroborated by legal and historical facts pertaining to the island. Thus, instead of levelling unfounded accusations, which only creates an environment of mistrust and hostility between the two peoples of the island, the Greek Cypriot side should make a sincere effort to help build an atmosphere conducive to cooperation between the two sides in Cyprus, as also called upon by you in your most recent reports on your mission of good offices in Cyprus ([S/2021/1109](#)) and on the operations of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus ([S/2021/1110](#)).

Availing myself of the present opportunity, I would like to also remind the Greek Cypriot administration that its counterpart is, and has always been, the Turkish Cypriot side, not Turkey.

I would be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 10 and 44.

(Signed) Mehmet **Dânâ**
Representative
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
