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Question of Cyprus

Letter dated 30 September 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 29 September 2020, 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 item 44.

(Signed) Feridun H. **Sinirlioğlu**
Permanent Representative



Annex to the letter dated 30 September 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing in relation to the virtual informal plenary meeting held on 31 August 2020 on the annual report of the Security Council to the General Assembly, during which a Greek Cypriot representative also delivered a speech and grossly misrepresented issues pertaining to Cyprus.

At the outset, I wish to underline that Turkish Cypriots are still denied their rightful representation and participation in the international forums, including the relevant organs of the United Nations, effectively preventing the Turkish Cypriot side, as one of the equal co-owners of the island, from being heard and allowing Greek Cypriot representatives to blatantly distort historical and legal facts about Cyprus in their absence.

In relation to the issue of hydrocarbon resources around the island, the Turkish Cypriot side has always maintained the view that cooperation, dialogue and diplomacy on the hydrocarbon resources around the island of Cyprus is the only way to de-escalate the tension on and around the island. No doubt, cooperation between the two sides on a variety of issues, including the hydrocarbon resources, would contribute to the building of trust and interdependence among them, thus serving as a catalyst to bring about a negotiated settlement in Cyprus and lead to the de-escalation of the tension on the island and in the region. It was in this spirit that the Turkish Cypriot side tabled an updated and expanded proposal on the issue of hydrocarbons around the island in July 2019, which remains on the table.

Unfortunately, the general and insubstantial references made to the issue of hydrocarbon resources in the relevant United Nations reports and resolutions, as well as statements and actions based on political expediency by some Security Council members, continue to encourage the Greek Cypriot side to evade cooperation with the Turkish Cypriot side and intensify its unilateral activities, which is, in fact, the very cause of the escalation of tensions on the island and in the region. Therefore, if the international community is sincere about resolving this issue, it should, without further delay and in definitive terms, call for dialogue, diplomacy and cooperation between the two sides in Cyprus. Moreover, in this regard, we would also like to reiterate that any regional conference that may take place must include the Turkish Cypriot side, as one of the co-owners of the hydrocarbon resources around the island, as also acknowledged by the international community, and thus take into account the legitimate rights and interests of all relevant parties in the region.

In relation to the issue of the closed area of Maraş, which was referred to in the speech of the Greek Cypriot representative, I would like to, once again, underline the fact that the steps taken by our Government regarding the closed area of Maraş, which is part of the territory of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, are in line with international law, first and foremost, protecting and respecting the right to possession of former inhabitants of this town, as is also called for in the relevant Security Council resolutions. In fact, maintaining the unacceptable status quo at the expense of the rights of the said inhabitants would be a violation of the relevant United Nations resolutions. These constructive steps will, no doubt, also help to address the deep crisis of confidence between the two sides and their peoples on the island, since it will provide for former inhabitants, including Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, to work together and cooperate, building confidence and creating interdependencies. It should be stressed that the former Greek Cypriot inhabitants of the closed area of Maraş are supportive of the said decision of the Government of the Turkish Republic

of Northern Cyprus, publicly stating that this decision will provide them with the opportunity to go back to their properties, which they are ready to do.

In her address to the Assembly, the Greek Cypriot representative also made references, inter alia, to the issues of missing persons and cultural heritage. The fact of the matter is that the Greek Cypriot administration has long adopted a policy of politicizing these humanitarian issues for political propaganda purposes. As for the issue of cultural heritage, I would like to emphasize that the Turkish Cypriot side, despite its meagre resources, protects and preserves the cultural 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 heritage in North Cyprus, irrespective of its origin, the Turkish Cypriot side has also been actively engaging and contributing constructively to the work of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage, which stands as an outstanding example of the fact that the two sides can accomplish a lot through cooperation for the good of the two peoples.

On the other hand, 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 Greek Cypriots. Recent field studies conducted by our experts and the information gathered from Turkish Cypriots visiting South Cyprus have indicated that, of more than 130 mosques in South Cyprus, 32 have been left to collapse while the majority of those remaining are in extremely poor condition. Furthermore, all the movable cultural objects from these monuments, namely hundreds of Holy Qur'an manuscripts, prayer rugs, Holy Qur'an reading desks and pieces of Islamic iconography, have been destroyed or looted.

In relation to the issue of missing persons, the Turkish Cypriot side has been doing its utmost on this humanitarian issue, affecting both peoples, to assist in and contribute to the work of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus so that the Committee successfully delivers on its mandate. In this connection, the Turkish Cypriot side has always provided information about and granted access to possible burial sites in the North, in accordance with the 1997 agreement between the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot leaders, in order to assist the Committee in locating the bodies of missing persons. Furthermore, the Turkish Cypriot side has continued to provide any new information that could help the Committee in its work and, in August 2016, set up an archive committee with the mandate to further investigate the relevant archives for the information requested by the Committee on Missing Persons on burial sites and the location of remains. The archive committee has been actively cooperating with the Committee on Missing Persons and answering its specific requests for information on various cases. On the other hand, the Greek Cypriot side is withholding archival information from the Committee on Missing Persons and continues to politicize the humanitarian issue of missing persons, through false propaganda, by playing a blame game, instead of focusing its efforts on the matter within that Committee.

Taking this opportunity, I would also like to share the views of the Turkish Cypriot side regarding the treatment by the Security Council of the two sides in Cyprus. As is known, the *raison d'être* of the United Nations Organization, and primarily that of the Security Council, has been the maintenance of peace, stability and security in the world. Needless to say, from this all-too-important responsibility entrusted to the Council ensues the fulfilment of certain obligations. First and foremost, on an issue that is on its agenda, the members of the Council, particularly the permanent members who wield veto power on any decision, are expected to provide to each party to a dispute equal opportunity to express its views and concerns at first hand.

Unfortunately, this principle has recently been overlooked in the case of Cyprus – more so than ever. In this regard, for example, we see that no meeting was held with the elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot people during the recent high-level visits paid to the island by the permanent members of the Security Council. This approach denies the Turkish Cypriot side the opportunity to directly express its views regarding the prospects of a settlement in Cyprus and the current escalation of tensions in and around the island pertaining to the hydrocarbon issue. Council members are also expected to assist and encourage the real stakeholders in a dispute, i.e. the issue of hydrocarbon resources around Cyprus in the present case, towards its peaceful and just solution, rather than taking sides or being directly involved as if it were also a party to the dispute. Inevitably, asymmetrical treatment of the two sides by the Council, coupled with its silence in the face of the provocative actions of the Greek Cypriot side, not only exacerbates the Greek Cypriots' hostile stance towards the Turkish Cypriots, but also damages efforts for a peaceful resolution of the Cyprus issue under your good offices mission, as mandated by the Security Council. We rather expect the Council to adopt policies that would also be in line with your recent call for “serious efforts to avoid any further escalation and defuse tensions” (S/2020/682) and the Council's own call for “a reduction of tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean” (resolution 2537 (2020)).

Unfortunately, at a time when the unprecedented challenges in the face of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic peaked on both sides of the island, the increase in unilateral acts by the Greek Cypriot administration, including its ongoing massive armament program and the construction of around 190 firing positions (military bunkers) along the buffer zone, serve no purpose other than to increase tension on the island and further damage the already fragile confidence between the two sides, and it is a testament to the true intentions of the Greek Cypriot administration regarding reconciliation and building a future together with the Turkish Cypriots.

Notwithstanding the hostile and provocative policies and actions of the Greek Cypriot administration, it is the considered view of the Turkish Cypriot side that the key to the de-escalation of tension on the island and in the region can only be achieved through diplomacy and dialogue. In this regard, most recently, you rightly urged the promotion of closer cooperation among the Turkish Cypriot side, the Greek Cypriot side and international actors. To this end, the Turkish Cypriot side is determined to continue its efforts to create an atmosphere conducive to turning the island and the region into an area of cooperation and stability through diplomacy and dialogue.

In view of the foregoing, we believe that it is high time for the members of the Security Council in particular, and the international community in general, to create a level playing field for the two sides in Cyprus and to strongly encourage closer cooperation through diplomacy and dialogue. Such an approach will, no doubt, foster an environment conducive to the de-escalation of tension in the region, as well as pave the way for a negotiated settlement of the Cyprus problem.

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

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