



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

### Sixteenth session

#### Agenda item 2

#### Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

### **Letter dated 18 January 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the President of the Human Rights Council**

Upon instructions from my Government, I would like to bring to your attention a grave human rights violation that occurred on 25 December 2010 in the Orthodox church of Saint Synesios, in the town of Rizokarpaso located in the part of Cyprus under the military occupation of Turkey. This issue is directly related to the mandate in accordance with which the yearly reports on the question of human rights in Cyprus are prepared, as provided for in Commission on Human Rights resolution 4 (XXXI) and General Assembly resolution 3450 (XXX).

As confirmed by the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), on 25 December 2010, security forces of the subordinate local administration of Turkey interrupted an ongoing religious service, forced the priest to remove his liturgical vestments and to terminate the liturgy, ordered the churchgoers, mainly Greek Cypriot enclaved persons, to evacuate, then sealed the church on the pretext that no “permission for the conduct of mass” had been obtained. At the same time, the occupation regime did not allow for a Christmas mass to be held in the Church of the Holy Trinity (Ayia Triada) in the nearby town of Yialoussa. Subsequently, the occupation regime informed UNFICYP that a new “procedure” had been established, whereby prior authorization should be sought 30 days in advance for all scheduled religious services, except those celebrated on Sundays.

These acts contravene the third Vienna agreement of 2 August 1975, which, *inter alia*, explicitly provides that the Greek Cypriots who remained enclaved behind the military lines in their villages in the north-eastern Karpass peninsula in the aftermath of the Turkish invasion would be “free to stay” and that they would “be given every help to lead a normal life, including facilities for education and for the practice of their religion, as well as medical care by their own doctors and freedom of movement”. Even more serious, these acts constitute a clear violation of international and European human rights law, including article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and articles 3 and 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Government of the Republic of Cyprus strongly condemned these developments as yet another gross violation of religious freedom and of the right to freely practice one's religion. These acts are part and parcel of a wider orchestrated Turkish policy of intimidation against the enclaved persons, which has been going on unabated since 1974 and resulted in the dramatic decrease of their number, from approximately 20,000 in the aftermath of the Turkish invasion to only 357 Cypriot Greeks and 127 Cypriot Maronites today. In that regard, it should be noted that Turkey, as the respondent State in the 4th interstate case of *Cyprus v. Turkey*, was found to be in breach of articles 3 and 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights in the Grand Chamber of judgement of the European Court of Human Rights on 10 May 2001.

The Government of the Republic of Cyprus also strongly condemns the so-called "new permission procedure" established by the occupation regime for holding religious services in churches in the occupied part of the island. As the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom declared in a written statement on 3 January 2011 concerning this incident, "it is wrong and a symbol of religious intolerance and repressive policies of the Turkish Cypriot authorities supported by Turkey's occupation troops to require such a small church community to seek permission to hold Christmas Liturgy. Requiring such permission is simply a bureaucratic ploy that violates the universally protected right to freedom of religion and belief".

I should be grateful if you could arrange for the text of the present letter to be circulated as a document of the Human Rights Council under agenda item 2.

(Signed) Andreas Hadjichrysanthou

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