

**ADDRESS BY HIS BEATITUDE THE ARCHBISHOP OF CYPRUS  
CHRYSOSTOMOS II  
AT THE SEMINAR ORGANISED AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
BY THE REPRESENTATION OF THE CHURCH OF CYPRUS  
IN CO-OPERATION WITH THE CHURCH & SOCIETY COMMISSION OF THE  
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES ON THE THEME:  
«RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND HOLY SITES IN THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS»**

14 April 2010

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,

Filled with the exaltation and joy brought to our hearts by the Resurrection of the Lord, we greet you all with the glad tidings that “Christ has risen”!

It is a great joy and honour for us to address all of you, your Excellencies and Distinguished guests, who are here today to honour this Seminar with your presence.

We warmly thank His Excellency the former President of the European Parliament, Dr Hans-Gert Pöttering for setting this Seminar under his high patronage, and for his address to the Seminar.

Many thanks also to MEP Dr Eleni Theocharous for hosting the Seminar; and to the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Cyprus to the European Union, Mr Andreas Mavroyiannis; the Representative of the Armenian religious community in Cyprus, Dr Antranik Ashdjian; the Director of the Church & Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches, Reverend Rüdiger Noll; his Beatitude the Archbishop of Maronites in Cyprus, Youssef Soueif; and his Grace, Bishop Profyrios of Neapolis, for their speeches.

Special thanks are also due to the Representation of the Church of Cyprus to the EU, and to our dear friend, his Grace, Bishop Profyrios of Neapolis, as well as to Church & Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches, for organising this Seminar. I also wish to thank the European Parliament for hosting the Seminar here.

Finally, I wish to express my thanks to all those who worked so hard to organise the seminar.

“The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. There is an island” (George Seferis *Salamis of Cyprus*). This island is my homeland of Cyprus, the island of suffering, whose northern part, (37% of its territory), has been occupied for 36 years by Turkish invading troops who forcibly drove the people from their homes, villages and towns, and, with a view to altering

the demographic composition of the population, settled the North with large numbers of people from Turkey. In addition, they are barbarously and cruelly plundering and destroying our sacred Christian sites and other examples of our cultural heritage and are preventing our people from the free exercise of their religious duties. Suffice it to mention that just a week ago they refused to allow the Bishop of the Karpass to perform the Easter Service for the very few enclaved persons in his occupied diocese.

It is for this reason that the biblical and poetic quote, “The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. There is an island” is so highly topical: it rings out like an alarm to which the European Union and civilised humanity as a whole cannot respond with silence or find peace.

My homeland, Cyprus, was always a place of religious pluralism, with 80% of the population made up of Greek-Cypriot Orthodox Christians, 18% Turkish-Cypriot Muslims and the remaining 2% Maronites, Armenians and Latins. Until the Turkish invasion of 1974, everyone lived in peace and harmony in their mixed towns and villages, each person freely worshipping his or her own God. There have never been religious conflicts, uprisings or disturbances. This is still the situation on the government-controlled territory of the Cyprus Republic.

It grieves us to have to say that unfortunately, for the past thirty-six years, in the Turkish-occupied northern part of the island, religious freedoms have neither been respected nor implemented, and, as if this were not enough, the Turkish invasion troops, the settlers and the illegal regime in the North, which is supported by Turkey, in an unprecedentedly brutal and harsh way are systematically plundering and destroying our religious sites and monuments, our churches and monasteries, all that is sacred to us – including our cemeteries – and in general are trying to destroy all traces of the existence and presence of a Christian population in the north of Cyprus. They have even changed the place names of our occupied villages and towns and given them new Turkish names!

Under these insufferable conditions of oppression, enslavement and deprivation of their religious freedoms and other human rights, all that remains of the enclaved Greek-Cypriot Orthodox and Maronites, who in 1974 exceeded twenty thousand in number, are a mere three hundred people!

For all these reasons, the Church of Cyprus raises its voice in protest and asks, indeed, demands the withdrawal from the island of all the troops of occupation and all the settlers. Only thus will religious freedoms be restored in the occupied north of Cyprus, and only thus will all our religious and holy sites be saved and preserved: our churches and monasteries, our cemeteries, and, in general, all that we hold sacred, and which in the last analysis, are part of the world cultural heritage.

This is the dramatic message which we bring today to Brussels, to the very heart of Europe. We ask the European Union to support our demand strongly and powerfully and to work systematically and effectively in order to restore and ensure respect for religious freedoms in the occupied part of our island; to put an end to the looting and plundering of our sacred sites and monuments and to protect our religious sites. In order for this to be achieved, we repeat, it is necessary that the occupying troops and settlers withdraw from Cyprus.

We hope and trust that the EU, true to its principles, will not turn its back on us, but will exercise its power and influence in this highly sensitive, humanitarian, cultural and religious matter.

I salute this Seminar, and in closing I repeat once again the dramatic and anguished message: «“The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. There is an island”! Thank you!

Holy Archbishopric of Cyprus,  
14 April 2010.