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Hershel Shanks
Founder
Biblical Archaeology Society
4710 41st Street NW
Washington, DC 20016

Dear Mr. Shanks:

On behalf of the nationwide membership of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI), I am writing to express our concern that the Biblical Archaeology Society is supporting a travel program that enters the Republic of Cyprus via illegal ports of entry located in the illegally Turkish-occupied territory of the Republic of Cyprus. The legal manner in which the Biblical Archaeology Society can travel to the occupied area of the Republic of Cyprus is via the country's legal ports of entry as identified in this letter.

Specifically, our understanding is that the tour "Sailing with Paul in the Mediterranean," June 1-15, 2012, will travel from Antalya Airport in Turkey to the Turkish-occupied territory of the Republic of Cyprus, continue its route to the areas under the control of the Government of Cyprus, and return back to the occupied territory before departing for Turkey.

We strongly believe that such a trip *conducted in this illegal manner* undermines the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus and disrespects international law and relevant UN Resolutions instead of highlighting the archaeological significance of the region.

For the reasons outlined below, we urge the Biblical Archeology Society to withdraw its support of the travel program as its itinerary is currently constituted.

Cyprus has been illegally divided and occupied since 1974 when Turkey invaded the island in violation of international law, including the U.N. Charter. The invasion and continuing occupation of 37% of the northern part of Cyprus' sovereign territory by a force of 43,000 Turkish troops has resulted in:

- the mass violation of the human rights of the Cypriot people;
- the forcible expulsion of approximately 200,000 Greek Cypriots from their homes;
- massive colonization through the illegal implantation of more than 300,000 Turkish mainland settlers in the occupied areas of Cyprus;
- trespassing and illegal exploitation of property belonging to Greek Cypriot refugees;
- cultural destruction and religious desecration;
- suffering of a great number of families whose relatives remain missing since 1974 and whose fate is still unknown; and
- forcible ethnic segregation and division of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities.

The so-called "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" is a dissentious entity, which was unilaterally established in the northern occupied part of Cyprus by Turkey in 1983 and has been subsequently condemned as legally invalid by United Nations Security Council

Resolutions 541 (1983) and 550 (1984). These resolutions consider the Government of the Republic of Cyprus as the only internationally recognized government in the entire territory of the Republic and call upon the international community not to recognize, facilitate or in any other way assist this separatist entity in the northern occupied part of Cyprus. They also call for the respect of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus.

In conformity with the aforementioned U.N. Resolutions, no country, except Turkey, has recognized the illegal entity—the so-called “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.” The government of the United States does not recognize it. Therefore, no attempt should be made to provide it any recognition. The Government of the Republic of Cyprus remains the only internationally recognized government of Cyprus, which includes the northern Turkish-occupied part of the island even though it does not exercise effective control over that part of the country because of the continuing Turkish occupation and aggression.

As a result, being the only legitimate authority for the entire island, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, has declared all airports in the occupied area to be closed to international traffic. **The legal ports of entry into the Republic of Cyprus are the airports of Larnaca and Paphos and the ports of Larnaca, Limassol, Latsi and Paphos**, which are situated in the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus. Any entry into the territory of the Republic of Cyprus should be done using either one of these entry points.

Mr. Shanks, as an archeologist and leader of this prominent organization, we value your sincere interest in the region, and we would appreciate your attention be given to the dire situation of the archaeological sites in the occupied part of the island. For example, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) designated Turkey a “country of particular concern” in its 2012 annual report due in part to the restriction of religious freedom and religious and cultural destruction that has occurred in Turkish-occupied Cyprus. Moreover, we call to your attention a July 21, 2009 briefing held by The U.S. Helsinki Commission titled, “Cyprus’ Religious Cultural Heritage in Peril.” There, Author/Journalist Michael Jansen testified,

“The devastation is comprehensive and has taken place in a small area. Churches, chapels, monasteries, libraries, museums and private collections of religious art and antiquities were looted. Religious and historical sites have been damaged, ravaged and destroyed. While the focus of this meeting is on the island’s religious heritage, this is rooted in 12,000 years of history which came before St. Paul and St. Barnabas brought Christianity to Cyprus.”


Added Dr. Charalampos Chotzakoglou, professor of Byzantine art and archeology at the Hellenic Open University and the Museum of Kykkos Monastery, at the hearing:

Around 500 churches and religious sites belonging to the Greek-Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Cyprus, the Greek-Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai, the Roman Catholic Church, the Catholic-Armenian Church, the Catholic-Maronite Church, the Jewish community, as well as the Protestant Church, along with their cemeteries have been willfully desecrated, pillaged, looted and destroyed.”

We trust you share the view that international law must be respected and proper action must be taken to enter the Republic of Cyprus legally. We also believe the Biblical Archeology Society does not want to lend any recognition to an illegal entity that has committed such an egregious history of religious and cultural destruction.

We appreciate the opportunity to bring this matter to your attention. Thank you for your kind consideration of our request. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Nick Larigakis
President
American Hellenic Institute