

Memorandum
Exploitation of Maronite Properties in Occupied Cyprus

1. The Maronite Community in Cyprus has a history that goes back many centuries (over 1000 years). The Maronites of Cyprus practice their own Catholic Maronite religion, they have their own Arabic language, although they all are fluent in Greek, they use the Aramaic language in their liturgy and they have their own customs and culture. As an integral part of the people of Cyprus, when Cyprus declared its independence and the 1960 constitutional arrangements were imposed, the Maronite Community chose to belong, for constitutional purposes, to the Greek Cypriot Community. With the first census carried out by the newly established Republic of Cyprus in 1960, there were approximately 2572 Maronites living in Cyprus.

2. The Turkish military invasion of 1974 resulted in the occupation of all the Maronite villages, namely Kormakitis, Asomatos, Ayia Marina and Karpashia. Subsequently, the vast majority of the Maronite Community was displaced from its historical and cultural localities. Today, about 98% of the Community which now number about 6000 are refugees and are located in the areas controlled by the Cyprus Government. Specifically their occupied villages are as follows:
 - **Asomatos:** The village lies in the Kyrenia district. It is the second largest Maronite village. Prior to 1974, the inhabitants of Asomatos were nearly seven hundred. Today, only five Maronites live in the village. The Turkish army has established two centers in the village, one of them in the elementary school and the other in several houses. Several storage houses for petrol, food and artilleries have been serving the army in close proximity to the military camps. Under these conditions the Maronites cannot visit their relatives who are enclaved, except on Sundays when they are allowed together with a priest to have a mass in their village church and for a limited time.

 - **Ayia Marina:** It is the only Maronite village which lies in the Nicosia district. Prior to 1974 it had over six hundred inhabitants. Since 1974, no Maronite has been living in the village. The village belongs to Military Zone A of the Turkish army and civilians are restricted from entering, or staying in the village. In Ayia Marina, the Turkish army has established a large military unit. The new church of the village is used as a warehouse for military equipment and despite the community's continuous efforts and requests through the UN the Maronites were not allowed to visit their village and have a mass at their old church which is kept vacant. It must also be noted that the church icon of Santa Marina was taken by the Turkish army and is kept in a military museum in a nearby village. The Maronites coming from this village were also informed that some of their land has been illegally registered in the name of Turkish Cypriots.

- **Karpashia:** The village lies in the semi-mountainous area, south of the Pentadactylos range, near Asomatos. Prior to 1974, it had three hundred inhabitants. Today only twenty Maronites live in the village. There is no military presence in the village, although many houses belonging to Maronites are used by Turkish army officers as living quarters. Also the Turkish army is using properties belonging to Maronites outside the village for field armament training.
 - **Kormakitis:** The village which belongs to the Kyrenia district had about two thousand inhabitants prior to 1974. Today only 129 enclaved Maronites live in the village and their number is continually declining.
3. Maronite properties to a great extent, both individual and communal, remain seized by Turkey's military forces and are being unlawfully exploited. Especially two of the occupied villages, land and houses, have been confiscated without the consent of their owners for military purposes, such as military camps and military exercise fields.
 4. In these two villages (Asomatos and Ayia Marina) it must be stressed that the Turkish army has even confiscated Maronite schools that are now used as military camps and military administration offices. Furthermore, significant religious monuments of the Maronite community have been literally captured within the Turkish military camps. Specifically, the church of Archangel Michael of Asomatos village, the church of Ayia Marina and the Holy Abbey of the Prophet Elias in Ayia Marina village are within restricted military zones or being used for military purposes. The Turkish occupation regime has over the years demolished numerous Maronite houses, without the permission of their owners and in most cases without prior notice. Several other Maronite properties have also been confiscated and are being illegally used by Turkish settlers and Turkish Cypriots after their lawful owners were displaced and became refugees.
 5. Due to the massive exploitation of their properties by the Turkish military forces and by the Turkish occupation regime, the Maronite Community is prevented from access and enjoyment of their homes and from using its historic places of worship in exercising their religious freedom. Moreover, historical Maronite churches are being used for military purposes instead of being protected as lasting monuments of the Maronite tradition and heritage in Cyprus and the world catholic religion in general.