

Speech by Mrs Elizabeth Sinodinos, President of the Justice for Cyprus Co-ordinating Committee (SEKA)

Your Excellency Mr Yiannis Iakovou, the High Commissioner of the Republic of Cyprus to Australia, Ms Eleni Chrisofakis, representing the Greek Consul, The Hon David Clarke MLC, Parliamentary Secretary for Justice, the Hon Amanda Fazio MLC, co-convenor of NSW Parliamentary Friendship Group, the Hon Sophie Cotsis MLC, Mr Michael Christodoulou, President of the Federation of Cyprus Communities in Australia and President of the Cyprus Community of NSW, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the Justice for Cyprus committee I would like to thank you for today honouring the memory of the victims of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. And to thank you for keeping alive the spirit of hope of the refugees and the relatives of the STILL missing men and women that both may one day return home. By being here today you affirm that we haven't forgotten them. Both the dead and the struggle of the living refugees and their families.

Den Xehno. I do not forget.

I am not a politician. I was born here in Sydney the year the invasion took place. But I am a proud Australian and proud of my Cypriot heritage, which dates back over 10,000 years of human settlement to 4000 years of culture, from the Mycenaean Greeks, to the time of mythology, to Alexander the Great, to the Roman era, then the Byzantine Christian era and Venetian rule, followed by Ottoman occupation and British administration. Cyprus is the mythological birthplace of the beautiful Aphrodite and the handsome Adonis. It is a land of beauty and a land of welcoming, peaceful and beautiful people.

I bring this history and culture with me as a background to being Australian, hopefully enriching her diversity and contributing to her future. As an Australian, certain values are important to us. We respect people's basic human rights, we treasure our freedom and reject tyranny, we believe in democracy, we protect people's freedom of religion, we live by a code of law and order, we expect justice and we believe in a fair go. That means trying to do the right thing, having a basic

sense of decency, a sense of fairness.

And it isn't fair that so many people were killed that summer in 1974. It isn't fair that 180,000 refugees were evicted from their houses and 37 years later still can't go back to them. It isn't fair that in this beautiful land, a so-called green line divides nearly half the island so that it is paralysed from reaching its full potential as an independent, prosperous, modern nation for both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. It isn't fair that the families of 1,534 Cypriots don't have the closure of a funeral to say goodbye because they are still unaccounted for. Wherever they are, those souls cannot rest in peace yet. Nor can their families grieve.

It isn't fair that what began as a process of ethnic cleansing has ended not with justice or resolution or forgiveness but with 50,000 Turkish Cypriots moving to the area under the control of the Turkish Forces and settling in the properties of the displaced Greek Cypriots, followed by 150,000 settlers from Turkey moving to the north in violation of the Geneva Convention and various UN resolutions.

It isn't fair that Turkey defies the resolutions of the United Nations and continues to illegally occupy lands that don't rightfully belong to those who occupy them and which are culturally and archeologically significant to the entire international community.

The United Nations and the entire international community, with the exception of Turkey, recognises the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus over the entire island of Cyprus. It isn't fair that the laws of the international community are ignored as if they don't matter. If international law cannot protect innocent people from invasion and dispossession, why should anyone follow the rules? It isn't fair that those properties and lands are now being illegally sold to third parties so that it will be harder to get justice for the rightful owners. It isn't fair that despite the crossing points being re-opened, people suspected of Greek ethnicity are still not completely free to go to the northern part of Cyprus or to enjoy their properties.

Den Xehno. I do not forget.



If we allow invasion, dispossession, illegal occupation and murder to go unnoticed and uncondemned we are silently accepting and condoning a way of resolving disputes that has no place in the modern world. And we are doomed to repeat those mistakes over again.

But why are these events that occurred during the Cold War still important today? Here in Australia, half a world away, two generations later.

For the refugees and their families of the villages and cities of occupied Cyprus, it is very much an issue that's alive. Australia, the United Kingdom and other nations were very generous in allowing these refugees to begin a new life in their countries, but those lives and those of their families are still in limbo. So it is very much a community issue.

Cyprus matters because there are beautiful, unique, irreplaceable churches and their byzantine icons that are literally works of art. They are important for historical, artistic, cultural and religious reasons. Many of those beautiful churches are now mosques or stables. There has been no concerted effort of conservation or preservation. That is a loss to the entire community that can never be replaced.

The earliest known human activity on Cyprus dates back to around the

10th millennium BC. Archaeological remains from this period include the well-preserved Neolithic village of Khirokitia, dating to approximately 6800BC which has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, along with the Tombs of the Kings.

Cyprus is home to some of the oldest water wells in the world. Water wells discovered by archaeologists in western Cyprus are dated at 9,000 to 10,500 years old. These are part of human history, not just Cypriot history.

Beginning in 649 AD, Cyprus suffered from devastating raids in which many Cypriots were slaughtered and great wealth carried off or destroyed. No Byzantine churches survive from this period, thousands of people were killed, and many cities - such as Salamis - were destroyed and never rebuilt. In 1570, a full scale Ottoman assault brought the island under Ottoman control, despite stiff resistance, and every church, public building, and palace was looted. As we know, what precious little remains today is being neglected and slowly destroyed.

Another reason why Cyprus matters is that on May 1, 2004 Cyprus joined the European Union together with nine other countries. In July 2006, the island served as a safe haven for people fleeing Lebanon because of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. Cyprus is a stable, modern secular democratic state near the Middle East in these uncertain times.

The current unresolved dispute does not suit a modern, forward looking Turkey that wants to be the model of a secular, democratic Muslim state. The Turkish people, and Turkish-Cypriots in particular, are warm and loving people, and this unresolved bloody chapter is a stain on their international reputation as well.

What the Justice for Cyprus committee ask is that we remember these things. We want to continue to work towards a just solution. We want to begin the process of reconciliation, a reunified Cyprus for Turkish Cypriots, Greek Cypriots, Armenians and Maronites. We want justice for Cyprus.

Den Xehno. I do not forget.

Thank you.

Australian Hellenic Council NSW Inc.

As part of the commemorations for the 70th anniversary of the 1940-41 Greek Campaign, the Australian Hellenic Council (NSW) has produced a desk calendar. This special publication will be officially launched at Alexander's Restaurant, Montgomery Street Kogarah on Friday 29 July 2011, from 7:00pm. Endorsed by the Returned and Services League (RSL NSW Sub-Branch), the 2011-2012 AHC (NSW) Calendar celebrates the special bonds between the ANZACs and the pallikaria (brave young men) of Hellas in the dark days of World War Two. The Calendar combines 22 images with text to illustrate the story of Australian service in Greece and Cyprus between 1940 and 1945.

'From HMAS Sydney on patrol in the Aegean in 1940 to the Commonwealth War Cemetery of Athens today', stated AHC (NSW) Media, Policy and Research Director, Dr Panayiotis Diamadis, 'the

Calendar presents a range of images of the Australian experience in the struggle against Nazism'.

The Australian Hellenic Council (NSW) especially thanks the sponsors of the Calendar, without whom the publication would not have been possible:

- ✦ The NSW Parliamentary Friends of Greece;
- ✦ the Australian Hellenic Educators' Association NSW-ACT-QLD;
- ✦ the Greek Australian Conservative Coalition (GACC);
- ✦ the Australian Lawyers Phil-Hellenic Association (ALPHA);
- ✦ the Greek RSL Sub-Branch (NSW);
- ✦ the Order of AHEPA (NSW and NZ);
- ✦ the Cretan Association of NSW;
- ✦ the Samian Brotherhood of NSW 'Lykourgos';
- ✦ the Fthiotida Association of NSW 'Thermopylae';
- ✦ the Pan-Corinthian Association of NSW;
- ✦ the Pan-Macedonian Association of NSW;

- ✦ Thomas Hotels Group;
- ✦ the Bank of Cyprus Australia;
- ✦ Yiannis Catering;
- ✦ The Grand Roxy Function Centre, Brighton-Le-Sands;
- ✦ Alexander's Cafe, Kogarah.

The Memorial Arch at the Phaleron Commonwealth War Cemetery at Athens bears this inscription:

*We who to clothe Hellas in freedom fought
Lie here at rest in praise that fadeth not*

In our own way, the AHC (NSW) seeks to honour those who simultaneously served Australian and Hellenism during the 1940-1941 Greek Campaign.

The official launch of the 2011-2012 AHC (NSW) Calendar is open to all members and friends of the Australian Hellenic community. To reserve your copy of this limited edition, contact the AHC (NSW) on nsw@helleniccouncil.org.au