



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

### **Hearing**

### **Human Rights in Turkish-Occupied Cyprus: Erdogan's Record and Its Implications for the Ankara NATO Summit**

**Tuesday, June 30, 2026**

**10:00 a.m. – 12:00 a.m.**

**2255 Longworth House Office Building**

**Co-Chair James P. McGovern**

#### **As delivered**

I want to thank Co-Chair Smith for his leadership on this. I'm honored to be here with my colleague from Florida, Mr. Bilirakis. I want to thank the Ambassador and the witnesses for being here.

Today we look at Cyprus, the human rights in the Turkish-occupied area in the north, and the role of the Government of Turkey (also known as Türkiye).

We continue our examination of Turkey's record on human rights and democracy. At the last hearing, we were told of the trend toward authoritarian consolidation, greater repression of political opposition and journalists, and further limits on freedom of expression.

This record comes into sharp focus as Turkey hosts the NATO Summit in Ankara on July 7 and 8. President Trump is expected to attend.

Yesterday, I sent a letter to the President conveying the recommendations of witnesses at the June 3 hearing. It asks him to call for the release of prisoners of conscience, genuinely free and fair elections, and that Turkey abide by rulings of the European Court of Human Rights. I hope he does it.

I refuse to call any conflict "intractable." I refuse to give into defeatism. I believe any dispute, including Cyprus, can be solved with sufficient political will.

The U.S., U.N., EU and Republic of Cyprus continue to support a framework for reunification as a “bi-zonal, bi-communal federation in which the communities would enjoy political equality,” per relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

Talks haven’t happened since 2017. I ask our witnesses to update us on the possibility of returning to the table, and whether the October 2025 election in the northern areas provides an opening.

We look forward to hearing about human rights issues arising from the continued division of the island -- the fate of missing people, the rights of displaced persons, freedom of religion and belief, cultural preservation, and accountability under international law.

Greek Cypriots have raised objections to access restrictions on religious sites in the north, and concerns over the desecration and repurposing of these sites and places of cultural heritage.

According to the State Department’s report on International Religious Freedom issued in 2024, U.S. diplomats encouraged greater access. We do not have more recent information because Secretary Rubio did not submit an IRF report in 2025. This failure is a concern of many of us on this Commission.

The report also mentioned restrictions on visitor access to mosques in the Republic of Cyprus. People on both sides of the island are entitled to have their human rights respected under international law.

Today we will discuss UN frameworks that address the Cyprus issue. Witnesses will cite how Turkey is violating its obligations under Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention by facilitating civilian settlement into territory it occupies.

The United States should demand Turkey abide by its obligations, but will our voice have any credibility? For decades the U.S. has turned a blind eye to Israel’s violations of Article 49. In fact, the Trump Administration has been legitimizing Israeli settlements in occupied territory.

Double standards in our application of international law are self-defeating and undermine the causes we seek to support.

We all want a durable solution for the people of Cyprus to live in peace, security and dignity. That solution must involve the UN and be grounded in international law.

I am very worried that this Administration and this Congress are actively undermining international law. This week the House will vote on an appropriations bill that provides **NO** money for the UN human rights office and almost every other agency. Republicans on the Rules Committee rejected my amendment to prevent funds from being used to withdraw the U.S. from three UN human rights treaties, something that is under active consideration in Marco Rubio’s State Department. I think that would be madness.

I ask our witnesses, our audience, and my colleagues to consider what your advocacy would look like for Cyprus, or any other place in the world, if this Administration succeeds in removing the United States from the international human rights system.

Again, I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses. I thank Co-Chair Smith for his leadership on this issue, and I yield back.