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The Honorable
John Kerry
Chairman
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

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On behalf of the nationwide membership of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI), we write to you regarding the forthcoming confirmation hearing, scheduled for tomorrow, July 20, of Ambassador Francis Joseph Ricciardone, Jr., who President Obama has nominated to be our next Ambassador to Turkey.

As you deliberate during this hearing tomorrow, please be reminded that it is taking place on a very somber anniversary. 36 years ago to the day, on July 20, 1974, Turkey illegally invaded the Republic of Cyprus with the illegal use of U.S.-supplied arms and equipment in violation of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, the United Nations Charter article 2 (4), the preamble and article 1 of the NATO Treaty and customary international law. Turkey occupied about four percent of Cyprus during the initial phase of its invasion. Turkish pilots flying American planes dropped American-made bombs (including napalm bombs), terrorizing and killing innocent Greek Cypriot civilians in Nicosia, Famagusta, Kyrenia, and elsewhere.

On August 14, 1974, three weeks after the legitimate government of Cyprus was restored, Turkey broke off negotiations and launched without pretext the second and massive phase of its invasion of Cyprus. During this second phase, Turkey grabbed another 33 percent of the island, expanding its land grab to over 37 percent of Cyprus's sovereign territory.

The Turkish army has continued to occupy this territory ever since. It is an affront to the international legal order and a continuing threat to regional stability.

The invasion and Turkey's continuing occupation have drawn universal international condemnation, as reflected in U.N. resolutions, statements by members of Congress, The Council of Europe, the European Parliament and from many nations, and various court decisions in Europe.

President Obama in his campaign statement released to the Greek American community in October 2008, stated:

“As president, [I] will show U.S. leadership in seeking to negotiate a political settlement on Cyprus. [I] believe strongly that Cyprus remain a single, sovereign country...within a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation...A negotiated political settlement on Cyprus would end the Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus and repair the island’s tragic division while paving the way to prosperity and peace throughout the entire region.”

Since 1974, Vice President Biden has been a leading voice in Congress in his support for ending the Turkish military occupation of Cyprus and for seeking a just and viable solution to this problem.

Furthermore, Turkey continues to threaten peace and security in the vitally strategic region of the Southeastern Mediterranean by: 1) making outrageous claims to one-half of the Aegean Sea in total disregard of all the relevant international treaties and agreements in force; 2) engaging in provocative activities in the Aegean; and 3) refusing to accept referral to the International Court of Justice of the issue of the delimitation of the continental shelf. Despite the opening of accession negotiations with the EU and Greece’s sincere efforts to achieve complete normalization in relations with Turkey, the latter continues to threaten Greece with war (*casus belli*) and promotes claims that are unfounded and devoid of any legal basis.

Provoking tension in the Aegean, Turkish military aircraft violate Greek national airspace on an almost daily basis, even flying over Greek islands.

Concerning tolerance for religious freedom in Turkey and specifically as it relates to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, very little progress has been forthcoming on behalf of Turkey regarding safeguarding the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the spiritual leader of approximately 300 million Orthodox Christians around the world, including about 6 million in the United States, and its affiliate institutions in Turkey. On the contrary, in view of Turkey’s aspirations to join the EU, one can argue that there has been regression regarding any progress concerning the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The Turkish government has tolerated assaults against its Greek Orthodox Christian religious minority and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, continues the illegal closure of the Greek Orthodox Halki Patriarchal School of Theology and has illegally taken 7,000 church properties.

These actions violate U.S. principles on freedom of religion and U.S. law as expressed in Section 2804 of the Omnibus Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act of 1998 (PL 105-277). The law states that the “United States should use its influence with the Government of Turkey to suggest that the Government of Turkey:

- recognize the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its nonpolitical religious mission;
- ensure the continued maintenance of the institution’s physical security needs, as provided for under Turkish and international law, including the Treaty of Lausanne, the 1968 Protocol, the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the Charter of Paris; and
- provide for the proper protection and safety of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Patriarchate personnel; and reopen the Patriarchal Theological School of Halki.

As it relates to the issues mentioned above, I respectfully urge you to consider posing the following questions to Ambassador Nominee, Francis Joseph Ricciardone, Jr.:

- Do you support the removal of the 43,000 illegal Turkish occupation force from Cyprus?
- The Turkish military illegally occupies and uses real property that is legally owned by U.S. citizens in Cyprus. Will you direct your embassy staff to compile a list of such property and the U.S. citizen owners?
- Do you agree that this (the illegal occupation of American property in Cyprus) is a matter that should be resolved directly between the U.S. government and the Turkish government?
- What means will you use to express to the Turkish government that it must pay the fair rental value of these properties to the U.S. citizen owners for so long as the Turkish military excludes the lawful U.S. citizen owners from their property?
- Do you support the return of the 180,000 illegal settlers/colonists in Cyprus back to Turkey, which Turkey has transferred over the years in violation of the Geneva Convention of 1949?
- Do you think that Turkey is doing what it can to support the current negotiations on Cyprus? Isn't it true that Turkey is manipulating the negotiations by restricting the Turkish-Cypriot leader, Mr. Dervis Eroglu, at the negotiating table as it did with Mr. Talat?
- How concerned are you that Turkey continues to violate Greece's territorial integrity in the Aegean and Greek airspace almost daily? and
- Will you enforce U.S. law (PL 105-277) as mentioned above, as it relates to safeguarding and recognizing the Ecumenical Patriarch and its institutions?

Our position has long been that the United States, in its own best interests, should critically review and reassess its relations with Turkey. The recent actions and statements of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and other members of his government, regarding Israel, Iran, Syria and Sudan, which are contrary to U.S. policy and interests, only serve to underscore the need for a critical reevaluation of U.S. relations with Turkey. A good place to begin is with the forthcoming confirmation hearing of Ambassador Francis Joseph Ricciardone, Jr.

The core issues discussed above and the questions posed are based strongly on what we believe are in the best interests of the United States and are embodied within the fundamental principles of democracy and the rule of law.

Sincerely,



Aleco Haralambides
President



Nick Larigakis
Executive Director