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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**CYPRUS OPENS ITS PORTS AND AIRPORTS TO U.S. CITIZENS AND
OTHERS FLEEING THE VIOLENCE IN LEBANON**

U.S. Government Expresses Appreciation for Cyprus ' Support

WASHINGTON , D.C. (July 19, 2006) – The government of the Republic of Cyprus has launched a major effort to support the evacuation of U.S. citizens and others fleeing war-torn Lebanon for the safety of Cyprus .

“We are making every effort possible to help U.S. citizens as well as citizens of other nations,” said Euripides L. Evriviades, Cyprus ’ Ambassador to the United States . “This is a critical humanitarian undertaking of major proportions, and we are working all out to assist and support those evacuating from Lebanon.”

Ambassador Evriviades said the current situation reminded him of Cyprus ’ support of American humanitarian efforts following the tragic 1983 Beirut barracks bombing when 241 American servicemen, 220 of them Marines, were killed and 60 Americans were injured. Cyprus provided the staging ground for the United States ’ evacuation and rescue efforts. “We did then what we are doing now,” said the Ambassador . “We are cooperating with the United States and assist people in need in any way we can.”

Press reports carry estimates that there are as many as 25,000 Americans in Lebanon .

Cruise ship "Orient Queen" is expected to arrive later today in Larnaca, carrying the first group of more than 800 American citizens fleeing Lebanon . Some of these people will have to stay in Cyprus until chartered flights are available to carry them to their preferred destinations.

After a request by the US Embassy, the Cyprus State Fairs Authority has made its premises in Nicosia available to US citizens as temporary residence until their departure from Cyprus is arranged.

The Director of the Consular Affairs Division of the Cypriot Foreign Ministry, Omiros Mavrommatis, is coordinating all on-the-ground efforts in Cyprus .

"We expect that the arrivals will increase within the next few days and we held more meetings today to prepare for the increased work that awaits us," Mavrommatis said, adding that both the Cypriot Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the services involved have representatives at Larnaca Port around the clock with a view to facilitate foreign nationals arriving in Cyprus.

U.S. Officials Express Appreciation

Speaking during Tuesday's U.S. State Department briefing, Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Maura Harty said, "We're so grateful to Cypriots," noting that they are offering food and drinks to Americans arriving to the island from Lebanon .

"Cypriots have met every helicopter and ship with sandwiches and water and juice. They're just being fantastic," Harty pointed out. She added that "The Cypriot Civil Defense Force has been very helpful to us in what they have provided."

Earlier Tuesday, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza, who was already in Cyprus on business before the events in Lebanon unfolded, told Cypriot journalists that, "We are grateful for the collaboration the Republic of Cyprus has offered us in this difficult situation to evacuate people from Lebanon . We are working together with the government of Cyprus on this. There is a great opportunity here for us to deepen our cooperation."

Cyprus , which became a member of the European Union (EU) in 2004, was the first nation in the EU to join the ship boarding protocol of President Bush's Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), signed last year in Washington by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and then-Cyprus Foreign Minister George Iacovou. Cyprus ' cooperation with the U.S. in the fight against international terrorism is especially important because of the island's geographic position and its significant international maritime role.

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