

## REPORT - Misuse of St Magar Monastery - April 2021

On March 20, 2021, a live music session took place at the Sourp Magar Monastery located in Halefka in the Pentadaktylos mountain range in Kyrenia, Cyprus. This live session was organised by an event planning organisation, that organises and broadcasts electronic music events at entertainment venues, including historical and cultural locations. The event was recorded and uploaded on YouTube on 7 April 2021.

Office of RTCYPP received a copy of the YouTube on the same day and contacted Archbishop Khoren and the Mufti Atalay immediately. Office of EVQAF stated that they had not given permission for such an event nor were asked. Both religious leaders condemned the act and decided to make public statements. The Religious Leaders of Cyprus issued a statement through the Office of RTCYPP condemning the misuse as an act of disrespect towards a place of worship and called for the authorities to protect all places of worship against misuse, vandalism and desecration.

The Mufti of Cyprus statement of condemnation also urged the authorities to deal with such incidents accordingly. The Archbishop of the Armenian-Orthodox Church a statement in condemning the incident and urged the authorities to take the necessary steps to avoid such disrespectful acts at places of worship in the future.

The Office of RTCYPP posted on its Facebook and Twitter pages, both posts were shared and retweeted by Diplomats and Civil Society movements such as 'Unite Cyprus Now' and US Ambassador, Swedish Ambassador and UK High Commissioner all liked the tweet thus giving it further coverage.

The Swedish and US Ambassadors tweeted and deplored & condemned the act.

The incident and the statements were picked up by the local media and was widely covered by the GC press that condemned the act as well as some TC press that focussed more on the Mufti's statement.

Mr. Fotis Fotiou, the Commissioner of the Presidency of the Republic of Cyprus issued a statement condemning the misuse of the Monastery and Mr. Costas Mavrides, a member of the European Parliament and the Democratic Party in Cyprus, reported the incident to the European Parliament.

As of now, the Turkish Cypriot leadership did not post or made a public comment on the incident. The Turkish-Cypriot president of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage reacted negatively to the Religious Leaders' Statement reproaching the language they used as being too harsh and inciting propaganda.

The Armenian Representative to the House of Parliament of the Republic of Cyprus sent letters to Ursula von der Leyen - President of the European Commission, Charles Michel - President of the European Council, Antonio Guterres - Secretary-General of the United Nations and Jakhongir Khaydarov – Head of Mission UNDP Cyprus.

According to UNDP-PFF Update of 28 May 2020 conservation works on the Monastery which had started in early 2020 are on-going.

Below you can find:

- Religious Leaders' Statement
- Mufti of Cyprus' Statement
- Archbishop of the Armenian-Orthodox Church of Cyprus Statement
- Other Statements
- Media Monitoring list

## Statements of Religious Leaders

### Religious Leaders of Cyprus Condemn the Misuse of St Magar Monastery

7 April 2021

Religious Leaders of Cyprus are deeply saddened to hear the news that the grounds of the Armenian Monastery of St Magar were used for a live techno party on March 20<sup>th</sup> 2021, uploaded on YouTube on 7 April 2021.

The Religious Leaders of Cyprus condemn this unfortunate act and any misuse, disrespect and desecration of places of worship and cemeteries in Cyprus, irrespective of intention, religion, dogma & denomination.

The Religious Leaders reiterate their request that all places of worship and cemeteries, in use or not, are protected against vandalism, misuse and desecration. Disrespecting places of worship and cemeteries creates pain, nurtures mistrust and becomes an obstacle to peaceful coexistence.

#### Background Note:

Sourp Magar Monastery is located in Halefka in the Pentadaktylos mountain range in Cyprus. This live techno party was organised by an event-planning group, that apparently organises and broadcasts electronic music events at entertainment venues, including historical and cultural locations. The event was recorded and uploaded on YouTube on 7 April 2021.

Sourp Magar is an Armenian Monastery is an 11th century Monastery founded by the Coptic Orthodox Church in memory of Saint Makarios the hermit of Alexandria. The Monastery was transferred to the Armenian Community in Cyprus during the 15<sup>th</sup> century and has belonged to and has been intrinsically linked to the community ever since.

St Magar Monastery has been left uncared for since 1974 and is in dire need of immediate protection, renovations and full restoration. It is the most important place of worship and pilgrimage for the Armenian community of Cyprus and the only Armenian Monastery in Cyprus.

## The Office of RTCYPP on Twitter

- “Religious Leaders of Cyprus condemn misuse of Sourp Magar Monastery. They reiterate their request that all places of worship & cemeteries are protected against vandalism, misuse & desecration.”
- “Mufti of Cyprus condemns the misuse of Sourp Magar Monastery. Regardless of intent, such an insensitive & irresponsible activity is hurtful to the place of worship & those it belongs to.”
- "Disrespecting places of worship and cemeteries creates pain, nurtures mistrust and becomes an obstacle to peaceful coexistence" - Religious Leaders of Cyprus"
- “Archbishop Khoren of Armenian Orthodox Church of Cyprus condemns disrespectful incident at St Magar monastery. Welcomes the solidarity of all Religious Leaders of CY in particular the public condemnation of Mufti of Cyprus.”

## Statement of Dr Talip Atalay Mufti of Cyprus

7 April 2021

### Translation of Mufti's statement in English

#### **Subject: Incident in the Courtyard of the Surp Magar Monastery Condemnation Message Regarding the Event**

We are sorry to see that an activity that does not match the spirit of the place of worship was held in the courtyard of the Surp Magar Monastery in Kyrenia from the images published on the internet, and we condemn this insensitivity and irresponsibility. With or without intent, any activity that hurt the believers to which the place of worship belongs and that does not conform to the character of the place of worship is ugly and should be condemned.

Regardless of which belief group they belong to, regardless of the intention and purpose of individuals and groups in any place of worship, maximum sensitivity should be shown not to allow any activity that is inappropriate in terms of the belief that the place of worship belongs to and that hurt the believers, and judicial precautions regarding inappropriate activity attempts. It is important to do what is necessary, and we believe that the necessary action will be taken by the authorities.

### Original Statement

#### **Konu : Surp Magar Manastırı Avlusunda Yapılan Etkinliğe İlişkin Kınama Mesajı**

İnternet ortamında yayınlanan görüntülerden Girne'de bulunan Surp Magar Manastırı avlusunda ibadethanenin ruhu ile uyuşmayacak bir etkinliğin yapıldığını görmekten dolayı üzgünüz, bu duyarsızlık ve sorumsuzluğu kınıyoruz. Bir kasıt olsun ya da olmasın, ibadethanenin ait olduğu inanca sahip inananlarını inciten, ibadethane karakterine uygun olmayan her etkinlik çirkindir ve kınanmalıdır.

Hangi inanç grubuna ait olduğuna bakılmaksızın her hangi bir ibadethanede ve ibadethane alanında, kişi ve grupların niyeti ve amacı ne olursa olsun, o ibadethanenin ait olduğu inanç açısından uygun olmayan, inanurlarını incitici hiçbir etkinliğe izin verilmemesine azami hassasiyet gösterilmesi, uygunsuz etkinlik girişimleriyle ilgili de adli tedbir alınarak gereğinin yapılması önemlidir, yetkililerce gereğinin yapılacağına da inanıyoruz.

# Statement of Archbishop Khoren of Armenian Orthodox Church of Cyprus

7 April 2021

In the name of the Armenian church and community of Cyprus, H.E Archbishop Khoren condemns the disrespectful incident at St Magar Monastery and welcomes the solidarity of all the Religious Leaders of Cyprus, particularly the Mufti of Cyprus for standing up against all forms of vandalism, misuse and desecration of places of worship which are houses of God.

## Statement of H.E Archbishop Khoren in Armenian

Կիպրահայ գաղութի եւ Հայ Եկեղեցւոյ անունով կը դատապարտենք Ս. Մակարայ Վանքին մէջ պատահած դէպքը:

Կիպրոսի Ս. Մակարայ վանքը մեծ նշանակութիւն ունի ոչ միայն Կիպրահայութեան այլեւ համայն հայութեան համար: Պատմական Հայաստանի տարածքէն դուրս գտնուող այս սրբավայրը, թէեւ աներակ ու լքուած վիճակի մէջ է պայմաններու բերումով, սակայն իր պատմական արժէքէն համար, յարատեւ վերանորոգութիւններու կարիքը ունի որպէս աղօթավայր եւ պատմական կոթող:

Տագնապահար աշխարհին մէջ, երբ բոլորս կլանուած ենք Պսակաձեւ Ժահրի համավարակով, յանկարծ անակնկալի եկանք երբ իմացանք, թէ «Youtube»ի եւ «Facebook»ի վրայ երէկ եւ այսօր տեղադրուած է երիզ մը, ուր վանքն ու տարածքը օգտագործուած են երաժշտական «party time» հաւաքոյթի եւ տասնեակ երիտասարդներ երաժշտութեան առընթեր, ման կու գային խմիչքով, սիկարէթներով ու ամենէն ցաւալին՝ պարերով, հոն ուր դարերով պաշտամունք կատարուած էր...

Վստահ ենք, որ աշխարհի մէջ որեւէ կրօնք պիտի չընդունէր եղածը տեսնել իր հոգեւոր տարածքին վրայ: Արդ՝ խստօրէն կը դատապարտենք եղածը եւ կոչ կ'ուղղենք պատասխանատուներուն, պարտն ու պատշաճը կատարելու, անխտիր պահպանելու համար բոլոր հոգեւոր վայրերն ու աղօթատեղիները, լաւ իմանալով որ բոլոր այդ վայրերը «Աստուծոյ Տուն»եր են: Կրօնական սրբավայրերուն «Աստուծոյ Տուն»ը ըլլալու գաղափարը, համակրօնական յարգանքի պարտադիր հասկացութիւն է: Լաւապէս կը գիտակցինք թէ, ուրիշին պաշտած կրօնին հանդէպ յարգանքը, առաւել եւս կը բարձրացնէ մեր պաշտած կրօնին արժէքը, որով միաստուածեան բոլոր կրօններուն Աստուածը, միշտ կը փառաւորուի երկրի վրայ եւ երկինքին մէջ:

Վերջապէս, շնորհակալութիւն եւ երախտագիտութիւնս կ'ուզեմ յայտնել, Կիպրոսի բոլոր եկեղեցական պետերուն եւ յատկապէս Մուֆտիին, որ անմիջապէս իրենց ձայնը լսելի դարձուցին դատապարտելով սոյն արարքը:

Նիկոսիա, 7 Ապրիլ 2021

Խորէն Արք. Տողրամանեան

Կաթողիկոսական Փոխանորդ Կիպրոսի Թեմի

# Statement by Presidential Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs and Overseas Cypriots of the Republic of Cyprus

8 April 2021

## Translation of the statement in English

### **Written statement by the Presidential Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs and Overseas Cypriots of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr. Fotis Fotiou regarding the Armenian Monastery of Agios Makarios in the occupied Pentadaktylos**

We condemn with disgust the use of the historic Armenian Monastery of Agios Makarios (Surp Magar) in the occupied Pentadaktylos for events that are in fact a desecration of the place as a place of worship, but also as a monument of our long history.

The images on the internet from the electronic music event by a group of young people are, at the same time, another testimony to the systematic destruction of our cultural and religious heritage by Turkey and its settlers in our occupied territories.

As a Republic, we have repeatedly denounced the violent destruction, looting and desecration of our cultural and religious sites in the occupied territories, as part of a barbaric tactical obsolescence of our history and the Islamization of our territories under the control of the Turkish occupation troops.

More than 500 Greek Orthodox Churches and chapels as well as 17 Monasteries in towns and villages of our occupied areas have been looted, vandalized and in some cases demolished, while 77 Churches have been converted into mosques and several others are used by the Turkish army and occupation regime as warehouses, dormitories or even barns.

Especially the Armenian Monastery near Halevka in Pentadaktylos should be given special attention, as it is one of the most important monuments of the Armenians in Cyprus, with roots dating back to the 11th century, and instead of its destruction and desecration, it should be protected. and restored, as is the case in the free areas of the Republic with the protection and maintenance of mosques by the Government of the Republic.

## Original Statement

### **Γραπτή δήλωση του Επιτρόπου Προεδρίας κ. Φώτη Φωτίου αναφορικά με το Αρμενικό Μοναστήρι του Αγίου Μακαρίου στον κατεχόμενο Πενταδάκτυλο**

Καταδικάζουμε μετά βδελυγμίας τη χρήση του ιστορικού Αρμενικού Μοναστηριού του Αγίου Μακαρίου (Σουρπ Μαγκάρ) στον κατεχόμενο Πενταδάκτυλο για εκδηλώσεις που ουσιαστικά συνιστούν βεβήλωση του χώρου ως τόπου θρησκευτικής λατρείας, αλλά και ως μνημείου της μακραίωνης ιστορίας του τόπου μας.

Οι εικόνες στο διαδίκτυο από την εκδήλωση ηλεκτρονικής μουσικής από ομάδα νεαρών, συνιστούν, παράλληλα, ακόμη μια μαρτυρία της συστηματικής καταστροφής της πολιτιστικής και θρησκευτικής μας κληρονομιάς από την Τουρκία και τους εγκαθέτους της στα κατεχόμενα μας εδάφη.

Ως Δημοκρατία έχουμε καταγγείλει επανειλημμένα τη βίαιη καταστροφή, τη λεηλασία και τη βεβήλωση των πολιτιστικών και θρησκευτικών μας χώρων στα κατεχόμενα, ως μέρος μιας βάρβαρης τακτικής παραγραφής της ιστορίας μας και εξισλαμισμού των εδαφών μας που βρίσκονται υπό τον έλεγχο των τουρκικών κατοχικών στρατευμάτων.

Περισσότερες από 500 Ελληνορθόδοξες Εκκλησίες και ξωκλήσια καθώς και 17 Μοναστήρια σε πόλεις και χωριά των κατεχομένων περιοχών μας έχουν λεηλατηθεί, έχουν σκοπίμως γίνει αντικείμενα βανδαλισμού και σε μερικές περιπτώσεις κατεδαφιστεί, ενώ 77 Εκκλησίες έχουν μετατραπεί σε Τζαμιά και αρκετές άλλες χρησιμοποιούνται από τον τουρκικό στρατό και το κατοχικό καθεστώς ως αποθήκες, κοιτώνες ή και αχυρώνες.

Ειδικά το Αρμενικό Μοναστήρι παρά τη Χαλεύκα στον Πενταδάκτυλο θα πρέπει να τύχει ειδικής προσοχής, καθώς αποτελεί ένα εκ των πιο σημαντικών μνημείων των Αρμενίων στην Κύπρο, με ρίζες που φθάνουν μέχρι τον 11ο αιώνα, και αντί της καταστροφής και της βεβήλωσης του, να τύχει προστασίας και αποκατάστασης, όπως συμβαίνει στις ελεύθερες περιοχές με την προστασία και τη συντήρηση μουσουλμανικών τεμενών από μέρους της Κυβέρνησης της Δημοκρατίας.

## Other Statements

### Twitter

#### **Ambassador Judith Garber of the United States**

"The US Embassy strongly condemns the misuse of Saint Magar Armenian Monastery. Freedom of worship is a fundamental value, and we echo the call from religious leaders that all places of worship, in use or not, be protected against misuse, vandalism, and desecration," said in a Twitter post.

#### **The Swedish Embassy in Cyprus**

"The Swedish Embassy deplores the disrespectful use of Saint Magar Armenian Monastery and echoes the request by the Religious Leaders of Cyprus that all places of worship and cemeteries be protected from misuse, vandalism and desecration."

### Facebook

#### **Reaction of Turkish-Cypriot President of Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage on Social Media**

The Turkish-Cypriot Co-president of Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage, Mr Ali Tuncay commented on the incident and focussed on the language used in the statement calling it 'propaganda'. Many responded to the post, most people emphasizing the importance of respect to places of worship. Amongst those who commented was the representative of the Mufti of Cyprus in the Republic of Cyprus who pointed out that the incident should not be taken lightly and shared with Mr. Tuncay the statements and posts made by the Religious Leaders and others, including the US Ambassador's post that shared the same language used in the Religious Leaders' statement. Mr. Tuncay insisted on the "stylistic problem" of the writing of the statements and further argued about the names used for Halefka village and Pentadaktylos mountain range and that there are Turkish or even English names for these locations. Both Halefka village and Pentadaktylos mountain range are used in the English language despite the names being the original Greek ones.

#### **Unofficial Translation of the Facebook post**

"It is not acceptable to organize a techno party by this group of young people at Sourp Magar Monastery. I'm one of those who always emphasize that the sensitivity of believers should be taken care of when an event is held in places like this and I condemn this incident. It's not just disrespectful to a work, it's also a situation that jeopardizes human life by ignoring the conditions of the COVID-19 epidemic.

On the other hand, religious leaders / officials of both sides (Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process) made today as if they were out of a counter propaganda office " disrespect, desecration, vandalism " It is an unexpected approach from religious men who are expected to use the language of peace and consensus. You can condemn an event, but please use the peace language of the religion you represent when condemning."

#### **Original post**

Sourp Magar Manastırı'nda bu grup genç tarafından tekno partisi düzenlenmesi kabul edilebilir değildir. Bu gibi yerlerde etkinlik düzenlenirken inananların hassasiyetlerine dikkat edilmesi gerektiğini her zaman vurgulayanlardanım ve bu olayı kınıyorum. Bu sadece bir esere saygısızlık değil, aynı zamanda Covid-19 salgın koşullarını gözlemeyerek insan hayatını tehlikeye atan bir durumdur.

Öte yandan konuyu eleştirmeye çalışan her iki tarafın dini liderlerinin/görevlilerinin (Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process) bugün yaptıkları açıklamada bu olayı adeta bir karşı propaganda bürosundan çıkmış gibi "disrespect, desecration, vandalism" gibi çok olumsuz bir dil kullanarak betimlemeleri düzenlenen etkinlik kadar, barış ve uzlaşma dili kullanması beklenen din adamlarından beklenilmeyen bir yaklaşımdır. Bir olayı kınayabilirsiniz, ama kınarken temsil ettiğini ifade ettiğiniz dinin barış dilini kullanın lütfen.



# Media Monitoring

## GC press

<https://cyprus-mail.com/2021/04/07/islands-religious-leaders-saddened-by-techno-party-at-medieval-monastery-in-north/>  
<https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/cyprus-religious-leaders-condemn-use-of-armenian-monastery-of-st-magar-for-a-techno-party/>  
<https://famagusta.news/news/kypros/metetrepsan-se-klab-to-armeniko-monastiri-tou-agiou-makariou-sta-katechomena-eikones/>  
<https://famagusta.news/news/kypros/metetrepsan-se-klab-to-armeniko-monastiri-tou-agiou-makariou-sta-katechomena-eikones/>  
<https://www.kathimerini.com.cy/gr/kypros/katexomena-to-techno-parti-sto-armenomonastiro-katadiki-thriskeytikwn-igetwn>  
<https://www.reporter.com.cy/local-news/article/796358/binteo-estisan-xefreno-parti-se-katechomeno-monastiri-katadiki-thriskeftikon-igton>  
<https://www.offsite.com.cy/eidiseis/topika/oi-thriskeytikoi-igetes-katadikazoyn-hrisi-monastirioy-gia-parti>  
<https://www.alphanews.live/politics/binteo-ayto-einai-techno-party-tis-ntropis-sto-katechomeno-armenomonastiro>  
<https://www.alphanews.live/politics/binteo-ayto-einai-techno-party-tis-ntropis-sto-katechomeno-armenomonastiro>  
<https://www.offsite.com.cy/eidiseis/topika/oi-thriskeytikoi-igetes-katadikazoyn-hrisi-monastirioy-gia-parti>  
<https://avant-garde.com.cy/articles/nea/news/parti-se-monastiri-ston-katechomeno-pentadaktylo-binteo>  
<https://politis.com.cy/web-tv/antidraseis-sta-katechomena-metetrepsan-se-club-to-armeniko-monastiri-stin-chaleyka-kai-epaizan-techno-video/>  
<https://www.reporter.com.cy/local-news/article/796745/katingeile-to-techno-party-stin-ee-o-mavridis-diasoste-to-monastiri-apo-toys-ierosyloys>  
<https://www.philenews.com/koinonia/eidiseis/article/1165926/ekanan-klamp-to-armenomonastiro-stin-katechomeni-chalefka-binteo>  
<https://www.ekklisiaonline.gr/nea/vevilosan-me-party-ke-dj-monastiri-sta-katechomena/>  
<https://en.armradio.am/2021/04/08/us-condemns-turkish-party-at-armenian-monastery-in-cyprus/>  
<https://www.philenews.com/eidiseis/politiki/article/1166016/parembasi-k-mavridi-ga-bebilosi-armenomonastiroy>

## TC Press

<http://www.detaykibris.com/gencler-pandemi-kurallarini-hice-sayip-parti-yapmisti-251764h.htm>  
<https://brtk.net/atalay-surp-magar-manastiri-avlusunda-etkinlik-yapilmasini-kinadi/>  
[https://www.kibrispostasi.com/c35-KIBRIS\\_HABERLERI/n373414-talip-atalaydan-surp-magar-manastiri-avlusunda-yapilan-etkinlige-kinama](https://www.kibrispostasi.com/c35-KIBRIS_HABERLERI/n373414-talip-atalaydan-surp-magar-manastiri-avlusunda-yapilan-etkinlige-kinama)  
<https://brtk.net/atalay-surp-magar-manastiri-avlusunda-etkinlik-yapilmasini-kinadi/>  
[https://www.kibrispostasi.com/c58-GUNEY\\_KIBRIS/n373480-abdnin-lefkosa-buyukelciligi-ermeni-manastirinda-yapilan-etkinligi-kinadi](https://www.kibrispostasi.com/c58-GUNEY_KIBRIS/n373480-abdnin-lefkosa-buyukelciligi-ermeni-manastirinda-yapilan-etkinligi-kinadi)

9 April 2021