



HELSINKI COMMISSION BRIEFING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Hon. Mike McIntyre

Commissioner - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

I commend the Chairman and Co-Chair for organizing this briefing today on a long overdue topic.

Known as the “island of the saints,” Cyprus has played an important role in the evolution and spread of Christianity in the West. Since the 1974 invasion of Cyprus, the rich religious and cultural heritage of Cyprus found in the Turkish-occupied northern part of the island has suffered irreparable damage. Hundreds of Orthodox, Armenian, and Maronite churches and monasteries have been converted in mosques, hotels, stables, military warehouses, restaurants, or simply demolished. Priceless art and sites from antiquity and the Byzantine and modern Christian periods have seen extensive looting and destruction. Art objects eventually reach the black market and fall into the hands of art dealers and museums from around the world; the most recognized example is the Kanakaria mosaics, which were returned to their rightful owner in Cyprus in 1991 thanks to a U.S. District Court judgment.

The destruction of religious cultural heritage on Cyprus has been well documented, and its consequences painfully obvious, as the panel of experts assembled here today will attest. I applaud their work and look forward to hearing their presentations - somber as they may be.