

As a member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Hellenic Issues, Gus spoke on the House Floor on July 19 to recall a somber anniversary that has pained the Cypriot and Hellenic communities for the past 38 years. Watch here:

Remarks as prepared for delivery:

Mr. Speaker, I rise today not only as a member of this esteemed body, but also as a Member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Hellenic Issues.

I stand before you today to recall a somber anniversary that has pained the Cypriot and Hellenic communities for the past 38 years.

Mr. Speaker, even though the tragic events of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus took place so long ago, on July 20, 1974, the suffering of the victims has not subsided.

This anniversary is a time for America to respectfully remember the brutal Turkish military invasion of Cyprus, to mourn those who lost their lives, and to condemn the continued occupation.

Over 5,000 Cypriots were killed in 1974, and more than 1,400 Greek Cypriots, including four Americans of Cypriot descent still remain missing.

Since the invasion, Turkey has established a heavily-armed military occupation that continues to control over 30 percent of Cyprus.

Forced expulsions of Greek Cypriots on the occupied land have left nearly 200,000 people displaced. These Cypriots were kicked out of their homes, making them refugees in their own country. Those properties have been unlawfully distributed and are currently being used by the tens of thousands of illegal settlers from Turkey. To this day, Greek Cypriots are prevented by Turkey from returning to their homes and properties.

Another tragic result of this 38 year occupation is the division among Greek and Turkish Cypriots, who have been forcibly separated along ethnic lines.

This unnatural division of the island nation is a crime against society and to the people of Cyprus – that can only be resolved by ending Turkey's illegal occupation.

Mr. Speaker, 38-years is just too long. On the occasion of this anniversary, we need to take a long, hard look at our own commitment toward helping Cyprus reach a lasting and enduring peace – free from occupation, division and oppression.

A few years ago, the U.S. House had the wisdom and foresight to unanimously pass H RES 405, a measure I introduced, which expressed strong support from this body for the implementation of the July 8 Agreement.

Last month, my colleagues and I introduced H Res 676:

- to expose and halt the Republic of Turkey's illegal colonization of the Republic of Cyprus with non-Cypriot populations,*
- to support Cyprus in its efforts to control all of its territory,*
- to end Turkey's illegal occupation of Cyprus,*

- *and to allow Cyprus to exploit its energy resources without illegal interference by Turkey.*

The Republic of Cyprus has also worked alongside its European neighbors to bring about a stronger integration of Turkish and Greek Cypriot interests for the good of the Island and its people. This has included a partial-lifting on restrictions of movement across the cease-fire line that continues to forcibly divide Cyprus.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that because of this continued integration between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, and the economic and political successes that the Republic of Cyprus so readily wants to share with its neighbors, it is possible to bring closure to this 38-year occupation, and now as Cyprus takes over the EU Presidency, the first time since its accession to the Union in 2004.

Cyprus has long been a strong and faithful ally of the United States. It continues to work with us in the Global War on Terrorism and has supported our efforts in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, 38 years is long enough. It is time to have a Cyprus that is once again unified, without Turkish occupation troops, foreign illegal settlers, where human rights is fundamental for all Cypriots.

Every legal citizen of the Republic of Cyprus, irrespective of national or religious background, is eligible to enjoy all rights provided for by the Constitution and international conventions signed by Cyprus. The only obstacle – Mr Speaker – is the government of Turkey.

We Americans, as friends of the Cypriot people, owe it to them to do everything in our power to support peace and an end to Turkey's 38-year illegal occupation of Cyprus. Thank you.