

That prompted Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.), co-chair of the Congressional Hellenic Caucus, to introduce a bipartisan resolution calling for the protection of religious sites and artifacts from and in Turkish-occupied areas of northern Cyprus as well as for general respect for religious freedom. The U.S. House of Representatives on Tuesday passed the resolution, H. Res. 1631.

“Congress has shown it is making international religious freedom a priority,” said Bilirakis, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the International Religious Freedom Caucus.

Turkish soldiers have been witnessed throwing icons from looted churches onto burning pyres and leaving churches open to both looters and vandals.

“This measure highlights the continued violations that are taking place in Cyprus even as it celebrates the 50th anniversary of its independence, which is certainly a milestone, but is also a reminder that roughly one-third of Cyprus has been under Turkish military occupation for more than 35 years,” Bilirakis said.

The resolution also urges the Turkish government to protect the cultural and religious heritage of the Greek Cypriots living in the northern-occupied areas of the country, who have been prohibited from worshiping freely due to the restricted access to religious sites and continued destruction of the property of the Church of Cyprus.

“We’re calling on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to investigate and make recommendations on violations of these religious freedoms,” Bilirakis said. “Additionally, I continue to call on Turkey to remove its troops from Cyprus, remove its settlers, and come to the negotiating table in good faith to find a solution that is just for the Cypriot people.”

This resolution also demands that Turkey be held responsible for the continued violations of humanitarian law with respect to the destruction of religious and cultural property in Cyprus. Turkey’s actions in the occupied areas of Cyprus violate its obligations under several

conventions to which it is a signatory.

“Equal support from my Republican and Democratic colleagues illustrates that Congress can work together in a bipartisan manner when it comes to condemning violations of religious freedom throughout the world,” Bilirakis said.

Watch Rep. Bilirakis deliver remarks on the House Floor [here](#) .

Read H. Res. 1631 [here](#) .