

Cyprus gov't issues new preservation order on Melkonian property

*Alumni Association praises Minister Sylikiotis,
Representative Mahdessian for their help*

Nicosia (March 2, 2007) -- The Melkonian Alumni Association of Cyprus would like to announce that Interior Minister Neoclis Sylikiotis has issued a new preservation order on for the disputed estate of the Melkonian school in Nicosia which could cause indefinite delays in the administrators' efforts to dispose of the land.

The order was published in the Republic of Cyprus Official Gazette (Section III(i), No. 4178) on Friday, March 2nd, 2007, with immediate effect, which means that no one can harm any part of the old buildings erected in 1925 or even cut any of the trees of the forest on Limassol Ave. planted by the first orphans who found shelter in Cyprus after the Genocide of the Armenians by the Ottoman Turks.

A previous order, declaring most of the 125,000 sq.m. property a heritage site with "historical, architectural and national importance" had been overturned by the Supreme Court in Nicosia last December following an appeal by the lawyers of the AGBU.

The Armenian community then wrote to the President of the Supreme Court, the Attorney General, political party leaders and the Interior Minister expressing its dismay at the decision and calling on all parties involved to review the matter and reinstate the preservation order.

Reports published in the Cyprus media and reported on CyBC public television in February suggested that the Town Planning Dept. had reviewed the case and was working on a new preservation order based on stronger arguments justifying the decision in order to prevent the case from being thrown out of court again.

"I am delighted with this news as it shows the determination of the Republic of Cyprus and in particular the Minister of Interior to protect this important site not only for the Armenians of Cyprus and the whole Diaspora, but also for all the people of Cyprus for whom the Melkonian has been and will always be a jewel with historic value," said the Armenian Representative in the House, Vartkes Mahdessian.

The Melkonian Alumni, who were at the forefront of the struggle to save the Melkonian ever since the decision to close the school was made three years ago, were praiseful of the efforts of a few dedicated people at the Town Planning Authority.

"They seem to have appreciated more than some people in Cyprus and abroad the true value and importance of this historic school and the need for quality education," the Alumni said.

The Alumni also made references to the justification used to reintroduce the new preservation order according to which it is deemed imperative "to protect the larger part of the property with historic traditional buildings as a unified whole, as the property with its structured and natural environs is part of the larger historic and traditional town planning network of Nicosia, which must be protected."

The Alumni conclude that "with such decisions, as well as the general support of the whole community, hopes to reopen the school one day are revived. We thank the Representative, Mr. Mahdessian and the Minister, Mr. Sylikiotis, for all their efforts in this direction."