

May 17, 2006

The Honorable  
Ed Whitfield  
Robert Wexler  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Whitfield and Wexler:

On behalf of the nationwide membership of the American Hellenic Institute we express our extreme disappointment on the decision by you to host an event on Capitol Hill to commemorate the celebration of Ataturk's 125<sup>th</sup> birthday on May 19, 2006.

The capitol and its surrounding infrastructure stand for democracy, freedom, liberty, the respect for human life, and the rule of law. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, with his horrendous human rights legacy, is a poor choice for an elected representative of the premiere democracy in the world to celebrate his birthday.

To refer to Ataturk as "one of the most noteworthy democratic reformers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century" is Orwellian doublespeak. Below are some points to consider regarding Mr. Ataturk as you prepare this ill conceived and misguided celebration.

- In efforts to consolidate his power he suppressed all ethnic minorities such as the Kurds, Greeks, Assyrians, and Jews. Under his years as dictator of Turkey, the Kurds were denied their language, minority status, and simply called 'Mountain Turks' by the Turkish government.
- Ataturk participated in the expulsion and massacre of over 350,000 Pontian Greeks from their homes from 1914 to 1923. May 19 is the date that Pontian Greeks worldwide commemorate the Pontian Greek Genocide by Turkey. I refer you to Thea Halo's book Not Even My Name (St. Martin's Press, NY 2000) which describes that genocide.

- Under his orders in 1922, Ataturk's troops massacred 200,000 Armenian and Greek inhabitants of Smyrna (now Izmir) and burned the city to ashes.
- As a result of widespread atrocities and of decrees by the new Ataturk government expelling Asia Minor's indigenous Christian inhabitants, well over a million Greeks were ethnically cleansed from Turkey due to subsequent treaty's "population exchange" between Greece and Turkey negotiated by Ataturk.
- He established a ruthless dictatorship, not a democracy, that was used to suppress Muslims as well as Christians and Jews and crush dissent for his secularization program.
- He established the military's political dominance and perpetuated Turkey's authoritarian tradition to uphold his views.

Therefore, as representatives of our country's democracy, I strongly urge you not to host the event on Capitol Hill.

Sincerely,

Gene Rossides

cc: Members of the U.S. Congress