



## NEWS RELEASE

# OLYMPIA SNOWE



*U.S. Senator for Maine*

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## **SNOWE BRINGS CONCERNS ON CONGRESSIONAL TRAVEL TO CYPRUS TO THE SENATE FLOOR**

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senator Olympia J. Snowe (R-ME) today voiced her concerns on State Department endorsement of Congressional travel to Cyprus through an illegally occupied part of the island. Following is the full text of her statement as submitted for the record:

“Mr. President, I rise today to bring to the Senate’s attention a troubling development in our efforts to support the reunification of Cyprus. I have recently learned that the State Department is encouraging members of Congress and their staffs to initiate certain visits to the country through an airport in the illegally occupied area of the island—an airport that is not authorized by the Republic of Cyprus as a legal port of entry. In fact, the airport is built on property that was expropriated from its lawful owners following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974.

“As you may know, Cyprus was forcibly divided by an invasion of Turkish troops more than thirty years ago. Today, the United States and the world community recognize that the Turkish invasion was illegal, and that the Republic of Cyprus, which controls two-thirds of the island, is the only legitimate government of Cyprus. For years, as reflected in our domestic law and echoed in several UN Security Council Resolutions, U.S. foreign policy has refused to give either recognition or direct assistance to the self-declared administrative authority in the occupied area, the so-called “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.” Indeed, the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended following the Turkish invasion, has established that the United States supports a free government for Cyprus, the withdrawal of all Turkish forces from Cyprus, and the reunification of the island communities.

“On the specific matter of flights into Cyprus, the United States is bound by the Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation, to which both the United States and Cyprus are signatories. The Chicago Convention provides that “[t]he contracting States recognize that every State has complete and exclusive sovereignty over the airspace above its territory,” including designation of official ports of entry. The Republic of Cyprus’s sovereignty over the entire territory of Cyprus has been recognized and reaffirmed by numerous UN Security Council Resolutions as well as long-standing U.S. policy. Because the Republic of Cyprus has never

authorized direct flights into the airports in the occupied area, and because it has not designated these airports as official ports of entry, entering the country through these airports is a direct violation of the Chicago Convention. Simply put, our State Department should not be authorizing, encouraging, or even condoning such a blatant violation of international law.

“Moreover, flights into an occupied airport violate local Cypriot law. If Cypriots visit the United States, they cannot just land a plane in the middle of the country—they must land at an airport that is an immigration and customs point of entry. We would rightly object if a Cypriot landed at an unauthorized airport in our country, and we should not be encouraging Americans to do so in Cyprus.

“Over the past year, I believe the administration has been playing fast and loose with U.S. policy toward Cyprus, and has, at times, been less than forthcoming to me and others who are concerned with the viability of our efforts to facilitate reunification of the island.

“In late October 2004, officials from the U.S. Transportation Security Administration—over the protests of the Government of Cyprus—conducted an inspection of the airport at Tymbou, which is one of the airports in the occupied area. When I expressed my concern to the State Department that such a visit was not appropriate because flights into that airport would violate international and Cypriot law and are inconsistent with U.S. law, the Department assured me that it was not changing its policy toward Cyprus. Instead, I was told that “the visit . . . was a liaison visit to conduct a general review of the aviation security posture and was fully consistent with the TSA’s mandate to promote international aviation security.” It now appears that this visit may have been an early step toward encouraging Members of Congress and staff to land at this illegal airport.

“This past June, Members of Congress travelled, at the behest and funding of a Turkish Study Group, to occupied Cyprus and arrived at an occupied airport. Concerned that the State Department was permitting a blatant violation of international law and domestic Cypriot law, I raised this issue with the Secretary of State. I have now received a reply letter from Mr. Matthew Reynolds, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs, which I will submit for the Record.

“The letter indicates that the State Department has “authorize[d] U.S. Government officials to travel directly to northern Cyprus using tourist passports.” It further states, “[w]e have taken great care to ensure that our steps are consistent with U.S. and international law. Neither U.S. nor international law prohibits U.S. citizens from traveling directly to the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. . . . In fact, courts in the Republic of Cyprus have explicitly refused to penalize Greek Cypriots who have chosen to so travel.”

“Mr. President, this position misses the mark on several levels. First, as I explained earlier, the Chicago Convention—to which the United States is bound—bars flights into a country’s territory without the country’s consent. Cyprus simply has not consented, and thus these flights are flatly inconsistent with applicable international agreements. Second, although international law does not penalize individuals for taking such unauthorized flights, that point is irrelevant—the Chicago Convention is directed at states, not individuals. Third, there can be no

doubt that such trips are suspect—even the State Department seems to admit they cannot be undertaken on an official government passport. And finally, the decision by the government of Cyprus not to prosecute those who make illegal landings is a gesture of restraint, designed to promote the freedom of movement among the two communities. It is absurd to use this commendable restraint as a justification for encouraging further violations of the law.

“As justification, Mr. Reynolds stated that “we have taken [these] steps in support of the UN Secretary General’s call on the international community to ease the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots.” I agree this is a noble cause in principle, but it must be pursued in a way that is consistent with international norms, local Cypriot law, and broader U.S. and international efforts to bring together the two communities on the divided island. Several UN Security Council Resolutions—which the Secretary General’s remarks did nothing to abrogate—confirm the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus.

“Moreover, the economic isolation of the Turkish Cypriots is already being addressed effectively by the ongoing economic support and confidence-building measures sponsored or supported by the Republic of Cyprus. Flights that conflict directly with international and Cypriot law and divide the two communities on Cyprus serve only to discourage the government of Cyprus from undertaking such positive measures. Moreover, there is literally no reason to encourage such flights—the government of Cyprus permits, and is even prepared in appropriate circumstances to facilitate, free passage to the occupied territory for those who arrive at a legal airport of entry.

“Cyprus joined the European Union in May 2004, and the EU has been very active on resolving the Cyprus problem, from providing a forum for resolving the dispute with Turkey to proposing direct economic assistance to the Turkish-occupied area. It is interesting to note, however, that the EU members respect Cyprus sovereignty—not one EU member country flies into the occupied airports. It is inappropriate for the United States to get ahead of the European Union on the resolution of this conflict within its territory.

“Mr. President, I hope that my colleagues and their staffs who may be asked to visit Cyprus through an occupied airport will note the concerns I address here today. I would respectfully ask them to consider whether they think it’s appropriate for a member of the Cypriot legislature to visit the United States through an illegal point of entry. I would also ask them to consider why the State Department has indicated that travel to occupied Cyprus should not be on an official passport or in an official capacity. I also urge members to read the Chicago Convention and the UN Security Council Resolutions on Cyprus to see that these actions are in direct contravention to our international commitments. And I ask them to consider whether it is appropriate for a U.S. official to land at an airport that was built on land illegally taken from its lawful owners following Turkey’s invasion of Cyprus.

“While I have the floor, Mr. President, I would like to take a moment to review all the positive developments that we are witnessing in Cyprus, which continue despite the administration’s divisive actions. It is undeniable that the situation in Cyprus is moving forward. The Republic of Cyprus has proposed measures to open new crossing points along the cease-fire lines; withdraw military forces from sensitive areas; increase the ability of Turkish Cypriot-

owned trucks, tourist buses and taxis to cross the Green Line that divides Cyprus; increase trade across the Green Line, and open up ports to greatly facilitate trade. Further, the Republic of Cyprus is unilaterally clearing all land mines from the National Guard's minefields in the buffer zone.

“The Republic of Cyprus is also ensuring the economic development in the occupied area. Since April 2003 (when the Turkish military relaxed its movement restrictions) there have been more than 2.3 million border crossing by Cypriots into the occupied area. These visits have contributed more than \$57 million to the economy of occupied Cyprus. In 2003 and 2004, the Republic of Cyprus paid more than \$43 million in social insurance for Cypriots in the occupied area. Turkish Cypriots have been provided by the Republic of Cyprus with more than \$9 million in free hospital and medical care, and more than \$343 million in free electricity. The Republic of Cyprus does not isolate its citizens living in the occupied area—more than 63,000 have been issued Republic of Cyprus birth certificates, more than 57,000 have been issued Republic of Cyprus identity cards, and more than 32,000 have been issued Republic of Cyprus passports.

“It is also important to remember that the United States and Cyprus have always enjoyed a strong relationship. We have worked together on terrorism, the war in Iraq, suppressing money laundering, and other initiatives. For instance, in the lead up to the war in Iraq, Cyprus approved overflight rights for U.S. and other Coalition military aircraft as well as use of Cypriot airports. Important areas of cooperation between the United States and Cyprus are spelled out by the U.S.-Cyprus Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty. The treaty has been in force since September 2002 and facilitates bilateral cooperation in the fight against global terrorism, organized crime, drug-trafficking and related violent crimes. Cyprus is the first European nation to sign on to President Bush's Proliferation Security Initiative, which provides for shipping inspections and intergovernmental cooperation that is designed to stem the spread of weapons of mass destruction. The addition of Cyprus to the PSI is particularly significant because Cyprus has the sixth largest commercial shipping fleet in the world. It is plain that Cyprus and the United States share common goals and common values.

“Mr. President, this is a critical time for Cyprus. The two communities of Cyprus are moving together, their economies and peoples forming links like never before. The actions of the United States must encourage and foster reunification, not push the communities apart with divisive actions that challenge the sovereignty of the legitimate government of Cyprus. All Americans, whether officials from the administration or from this body, should educate themselves about these important issues before considering a trip to Cyprus through an illegal port of entry.”

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