LAPITHOS MUNICIPALITY

# Lapithos news

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# JOINT EVENT ORGANISED BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES, ASSOCIATIONS AND NGOS OF THE KYRENIA REGION IN CONDEMNATION OF HALF A CENTURY OF CRIMINAL OCCUPATION

On Monday 22 July 2024, the local authorities of Kyrenia, Lapithos and Karavas, the 36 Communities, associations and NGOs of the Kyrenia Region held an event in condemnation of the Turkish illegal occupation of whole of Kyrenia Region following the illegal and violent invasion by the Turkish troops aimed at the breakdown of the Cyprus Republic back in the dark days of July 1974.

The event was under the auspices of His Excellency The President of the Republic of Cyprus, Nikos Christodoulides and was attended by representatives of political parties, Members of the Parliament, Mayors of free and occupied municipalities, the Greek Embassy in Nicosia, the Armed Forces and the Police, Presidents and members of Community Councils, associations and organisations of the Kyrenia Region, and several co-patriots.

The President of the Republic had a previous engagement (AHEPA event) so he was represented by Energy, Trade & Industry Minister George Papanastasiou who kindly delivered President's address.

**His Eminence Chrysostomos The Metropolitan Bishop of Kyrenia** lead a service in memory of the fallen and a prayer for the missing.

In her address, Lapithos Mayor Soula Mourettou noted:

"Standing on this sacred symbolic monument honouring the Immortal Heroes of Cyprus Liberty, we, the residents of the municipalities, the Communities, the Associations and the organised bodies of the tortured Region of Kyrenia, once again strongly condemn the continuing ruthless occupation of our land by Turkey and our violent displacement from the land of our fathers. Marking such sad anniversaries, such dark moments in the Hellenic history, is difficult and painful.

For us, these days are days of Commemoration and Tribute; every year, deeply moved and greatly concerned, we pay our respect to the fallen and to those who defended the freedom of our homeland. At the same time we cannot forget the most tragic aspect of th Cyprus issue, that of the missing; we pray for the determination of their fate as soon as possible.

We pay our respect and express our gratitude to our brothers who fell heroically and we remember the civilians, the victims of the Turkish atrocities as well as those who died in peace but lived as refugees bearing the burden of injustice and longing to return to their home. Fifty years on, more than 50% of the first generation of refugees died and were buried away from their homeland. Today we keep on fighting along with the second and third generation of refugees running the risk of our objectives and demands being downgraded and weakened.

Those who fell, fought and sacrificed, left us a huge obligation and a sacred legacy: to keep on fighting for their cause, to keep fighting for our return to our homes. We need to seek justice for them. People only die when we forget them.

According to a Resolution unanimously approved by those present, half a century of illegal occupation is a disgrace for the free nations of today. After 50 years, democratic values and principles continue to be violated in Cyprus with no glimpse of hope.

"Land cannot be carried on one's shoulder", poet Yorgos Seferis wrote. This is our land and it belongs to us.

The event's moderation was by the acclaimed scholar Frosso Nikiforou.

# Anti-Occupation event held by Lapithos-Karavas Refugees' Associations

In cooperation with the relevant local authorities, "Lapithos" and "Karavas" Refugees's Associations held an event in condemnation of the 50-year violent invasion, illegal occupation and sad destruction of our two towns. The event which was very well attended by both residents and officials, took place at the symbol of resistance at Ledra Palace crossing point before th statue of Efrossyni Proestou, the Lady of Lapithos and a symbol of national pride and resilience. The event started with a memorial service for the fallen and a prayer for the missing by His Eminence Bishop of Kyrenia Chrysostomos.

Dimitris Minas, President of the "Lapithos" Refugees' Association and Andreas Haralambous, President of the "Karavas" Refugees Association made welcome addresses while the keynote speech was delivered by Mihalis Pilavakis, President of the Association of the 256 Infantry Battalion Survivors. Pilavakis gave a detailed account of that disastrous day of 6 August 1974 which plunged the previously prosperous towns of Lapithos and Karavas into darkness.

Just ahead otpf the 6th of August, it was obvious that Lapithos and Karavas had always been the bone of contention and the next target of the invaders. The Turkish forces assumed their position and they kept being reinforced until they reached a high level of readiness and effectiveness; they stood ready to wipe out everything they would come across.

On the contrary, the defending forces were facing huge difficulties, lack of coordination and logistics failures which rendered them completely powerless.

By 6 August 14,000 Turkish troops were gathered including the 39th and 28th Infantry battalions, special forces units of the 23rd Marines Brigade, parachuters of the 61st Regiment, marines of the Amphibious Operations Regiment along with a tanks force under the command of Captain Zikri Zipel. Major General Fazil Polat, former Commander of the 28th Battalion led the operations.

On the other side, the defence of Lapithos and Karavas was hastily organised in just 48 hours bringing together units of 256th Infantry Battalion, 286th Field Artillery Battalion, one unit of the 70th Engineer Battalion, two units of the Greek Regiment in Cyprus and limited number of Resesrve Corps officers of the 281st, 241st, 231st Infantry Battalions and the 316th, 366th and 321st Mobilised Battalions.

The sad outcome of that epic battle is shocking.

In his memoirs, General Polat describes the Lapithos and Karavas battle as the most fierce one of the Turkish invasion and as the ultimate battle with significant Turkish losses.

For the Greek Cypriot side, the tragic record speaks volumes: 95 people of Lapithos and 54 of Karavas dead or missing; 44 people of Lapithos and 14 of Karavas captured; over 230 residents trapped in Lapithos and 80 in Karavas.

The overall losses of the heroic defenders of the two towns and the mountainous region of Pentadaktylos were 150 dead or missing.

Sweet Lapithos and beautiful Karavas are still alive and waiting for us.

*The bust of Efrosini Proestou*

The Municipality of Lapithos continues the struggle for vindication with cultural and other events in Cyprus while we remain refugees. It keeps the flame of the desire of return burning.

At the barricade of Ledra Palace, just a few metres from the wall of shame built by sheer force by the occupational army, stands the Lady of Lapithos, Efrosini Proestou who stares loftily. She was a mother of brave men, a woman that would not bow down to the brutality of the invader in order to protect the soldiers fighting to honour Lapithos. A cry of resistance stands still in the common Struggle for freedom.

In her honour are laid down wreaths of glory by the Municipality of Lapithos and by surviving soldiers. In her immortal presence, the promise of struggle and return is ever present.

The debt to those who fought with all their might for their country and its freedom, for dignity is immense. The Municipality of Lapihtos honours its worthy fighters for freedom and gives an oath to continue the struggle for vindication and return to their fathers' land.

Events in their honour, events of remembrance, for those who fought valiantly, for those who died fighting, for those still missing continue.