

## **Cyprus leaders to decide fate of collapsed church in buffer zone, Technical Committee Head tells CNA**



The restoration of a recently collapsed church, located within Nicosia's buffer zone, is a matter for the two leaders to decide, Takis Hadjidemetriou, the Greek Cypriot Head of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage has told CNA.

Part of St. James church, which was in need for immediate restoration works, collapsed after recent heavy rainfall. The issue was raised during separate meetings, Hadjidemetriou and his Turkish Cypriot counterpart, Ali Tuncay, had recently with President of Cyprus, Nicos Anastasiades, and Turkish Cypriot leader, Mustafa Akinci, respectively.

Replying to CNA questions on the matter, Hadjidemetriou said that the monument's restoration was the only issue discussed during his meeting with President Anastasiades, last Wednesday.

The handling of this issue "goes beyond the capabilities of the Technical Committee" since the church is located within the buffer zone and the Turkish army is also involved, said Hadjidemetriou.

"I believe that the issue will be discussed by the leaders" he noted, pointing to a forthcoming meeting between President Anastasiades and Mustafa Akinci, on February 26. "It is a matter for the leaders to handle" he said and expressed hope that they can find a point of convergence.

Asked about the outcome of Wednesday's meeting, Hadjidemetriou said that President Anastasiades "is always supportive towards the Committee." He also said that the Committee was promised support, worth half a million euros, that would be used for specific projects.

As for the reasons of St. James' collapse, the Head of the Technical Committee pointed to the Turkish army, which delayed any restoration works asking for the area's demining.

He added that the adjacent church of St. George, also within the buffer zone "shares the same fate with St. James" and is in dire need of restoration.

Religious leaders unite their voice

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In a joint statement, the religious leaders of Cyprus note that they received the news of the collapse of part of the St. James church with deep pain "for our continuous joint efforts since 2014 did not avail this tragedy."

Moreover, Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus, the Mufti of Cyprus Talip Atalay, Maronite Archbishop Yousef Soueif, Armenian Archbishop Khoren Doghramadjian and Latin Patriarchal Vicar Jerzy Kraj renew their joint plea, aired since 2014 for the urgent need to appropriately reinforce and restore St. James as well as St. George.

According to an announcement by the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, religious leaders express moreover hope that the upcoming meeting of the two political leaders on 26 February will provide an opportunity for them to discuss and resolve all obstacles to reinforce and restore both these historic monuments.

They ask for the full cooperation of all those involved and pray that the efforts of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage, that has agreed to take over the responsibility of these two Byzantine monuments since March 2017, are renewed with urgency with the support of all stakeholders including the rightful owner.

“As leaders of the five main religious communities of Cyprus, we stand together as brothers committed to ensure that all sacred places for our faithful, all places of worship that are part of Cyprus religious and cultural heritage are respected as such, cared for, protected and restored” they conclude.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974, when Turkey invaded and occupied its northern third.

(Source: Cyprus News Agency)