

Makarios III Oral History Statement – JFK#1, 03/26/1964
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Biographical Note

Makarios III (1913-1977) was the Archbishop and head of state of Cyprus from 1960 to 1974. This statement focuses on meeting with John F. Kennedy concerning the struggle for independence in Cyprus, among other topics.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Makarios III

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Oral History Statement

by

MAKARIOS III

March 26, 1964
Nicosia, Cyprus

For the John F. Kennedy Library

Millions of people all over the world were deeply shocked when they heard on the 22nd of November, 1963, the news that President Kennedy died by an assassin's bullet during his visit to the city of Dallas. President Kennedy lost his life. And the world lost Kennedy. And the world without Kennedy seemed different.

The history of the world is the history of peoples of all countries. The history of peoples, however, and consequently the history of the world bears the personal seal of certain great men. It can be said of these men and especially of great leaders that they are to a certain degree responsible for the direction of history.

It was the general belief that President Kennedy was one such leader, capable of molding situations not only in his country but directly or indirectly on a worldwide scale. Many millions placed their hopes on President John Kennedy as the man who possessed the will and the ability to establish

world peace. And with the death of Kennedy, the agonizing question was put: What would be the immediate fate of the world without Kennedy, this confident leader who was striving for a better understanding among the peoples and the prevalence of world peace? History would give the answer. Had the bullet that struck President Kennedy perhaps struck peace itself? For peace and war and the lives of many thousands depend on the leaders of nations.

The life of John Kennedy was not a long one. It was terminated so abruptly at its prime. The time of his Presidency was so short. His achievements, however, were far greater than his age and his tenure of office. His work has secured for him an outstanding place in history and his memory has become an enduring symbol.

I have met many leaders of great and small countries and I have formed my personal opinions about them. The one who impressed me more from the first time that we met and whom I came to love and esteem was President Kennedy.

The struggle of Cyprus for freedom had led me many times on enlightenment campaigns for the United States. I believed that the creation of a favorable public opinion in the United States would be very helpful to the cause of Cyprus. Every time I went to the United States I did not

fail to visit Boston with which I had maintained close ties as an old student at the School of Theology at Boston University. During one of my visits, in December 1957, a Greek American of Boston asked me if I had met Senator John Kennedy. At my negative reply, he said to me, "You must. You must meet Senator Kennedy. He is a man who could help you. I believe that one day he will be President of the United States." The meeting was arranged, and the next day I met Senator Kennedy at his office. As I entered his office, he rose from his chair and came towards me with a cordial smile and an outstretched hand. For a moment I felt somewhat uncomfortable, and I did not know how to begin explaining the purpose of my visit. But any reserve that I may have felt instantly fell away. Senator Kennedy, with his kindness and simplicity, had created immediately a warm atmosphere for his visitor.

I explained briefly the Cyprus question. I was pleasantly surprised to find him already well aware of it. "I read your statement in the newspaper, Boston Daily Record," he said to me. "And I will ask that it be included in the Congressional Record." My statement appeared in the Appendix of the Congressional Record, on March 6, 1958, showing that this was done at the request of Senator Kennedy.

This first meeting with John Kennedy produced in me a feeling of deep esteem and affection. The charm of his personality and many other evident qualities had made a deep impression on me. I left his office with the feeling that in his person the British Colony of Cyprus, as it then was, had a great friend and advocate of its freedom. I also shared the opinion of my Boston friend that one day John Kennedy would be President of the United States.

Four years later, the Senator of Massachusetts took residence in the White House. I was deeply satisfied with the election of John Kennedy to the office of President. I was pleased and proud because I knew personally the President of the United States, who, as Senator of Massachusetts had shown warm interest in Cyprus. In the meantime Cyprus had been proclaimed an independent State and I was its President. Would President Kennedy remember our old acquaintance and would he continue to show his interest in Cyprus? Yes, he did. I was among the first heads of state whom he invited for an official visit to the United States. I was very touched by the invitation and I considered it a great honor, as I was the head of one of the smallest states in the world. In June, 1962, I arrived at New York as an official guest of President Kennedy. His personal plane took me on

to Washington. When we landed I saw from the cabin window President Kennedy coming towards the landing steps of the plane. He looked so young with his boyish face, and the shock of fair hair which made him look even younger. It was difficult to believe that upon this young man, who appeared almost a boy, depended the fate of millions. When I stepped down, he took my hand, smiling. "Welcome to the United States. I am happy to see you again," he said. His kindness and the simplicity of his manner carried me through the intricacies of American reception protocol. After, I greeted the officials and inspected the Guard of Honor, and I was led to a dais where President Kennedy addressed me. In his welcoming speech he referred to the struggle of the people of Cyprus for their freedom and said very complimentary words for me. As I listened to his speech and watched his earnest face, I felt that he was giving me a part of his own grandeur and a fraction of his own power.

At noon I went to the White House where President Kennedy was giving a lunch in my honor. He welcomed me at the entrance and before going into the reception hall he took me on a personal tour of the historic rooms where presidents before him also lived and worked. Every detail was in great taste. He told me with much pride that

Mrs. Kennedy had made many changes. During our walk through the House, he took me to Abraham Lincoln's room, where I saw a large portrait of the assassinated president and a bed. Standing nearby, President Kennedy said, "The great president left so much unfinished work. His death was a tragedy to the nation."

In the afternoon of the same day we were to have official talks. President Kennedy came to Blair House, where I was staying in order to accompany me to the presidential office. "Would you prefer to walk or to take the car?" he asked me. "I prefer to walk" was my answer. I was proud to walk accompanied by the President of the United States. Before beginning our talks, President Kennedy showed me various official offices and explained to me their functions. At one point we arrived at an open door leading to the garden. When he saw somebody there from the staff, he asked that Caroline be brought over to see Archbishop Makarios. I was sorry to find that the little daughter of the President was still asleep.

When we sat around the conference table the simple manner of President Kennedy gave me the courage to say to him, "Don't you think that you are too young to be President of the United States?" From the severe faces of the other

people who were sitting at the talks, I gathered that perhaps they disapproved of my question. I believed though that President Kennedy would not misunderstand me. In spite of his great office, he had a simplicity and humility, something so human, that I had the courage to tease him. "But you are also too young to be an Archbishop and a President," commented the President with a broad smile. We talked about many matters and among other things he said to me that he would help the progress and development of the island in various ways. I invited him to visit Cyprus. "It may be difficult for me to come for the time being," he replied. "But Vice President Johnson might come on my behalf. In the near future he will make a tour of Europe and the Middle East and I will tell him to include Cyprus in his program." A few months later, Vice President Johnson did, in fact, visit Cyprus.

My talks with President Kennedy, the warm reception I received from him, the simplicity of his manner, the kindness of his behavior, his natural liking for people, made me feel of President Kennedy a profound appreciation. I remember the moment I said goodbye to him when leaving the White House. He accompanied me up to my car, and when I had entered, he closed the door himself. It was another example

of the magnitude of his simplicity. Many leaders enjoy great international reputations and others are considered great men because they are leaders of great countries. Only some of them, however, have surpassed their reputation. President Kennedy was one of them. He combined simplicity with dignity, grandeur with humility, and strength with kindness. He was a great leader; but he was above all a man in the real sense of the word as defined in ancient Greek philosophy.

I was deeply shocked like many millions of people when I heard the news of his tragic death. Many great men had a violent death. I don't think, however, that so many millions throughout the world have mourned and wept as they did at the death of John Kennedy. The people of Cyprus mourned the death of President John Kennedy as if he were their own beloved leader. When the memorial service took place in the Catholic Church of the capitol of Cyprus, thousands gathered spontaneously outside the church. Most of them were quietly crying, all were mourning. John Kennedy was the man on whom many hopes for a peaceful and better future for mankind were based. Millions wept not only because of the work which he had accomplished, but also for what he would be able to achieve in the future, if not cut down so suddenly. President John Kennedy was a most promising

leader. John Kennedy should not have died. But he died.
And many hopes died with him. As an epitaph for Kennedy I
recall here the words of the ancient Greek poet, Pindar:-

"O Megas, I cannot bring you back to life:
Only despair awaits those who would attempt the feat.
Now I raise up in your city
This marble column of the Muses in order to honor
The day when you ran races....."