Denktash Says Wants to Clear Mines (Cyprus)

Nicosia (Cyprus) - Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktash said on Thursday his administration was willing to clear thousands of land mines peppering his side of a "green line" that has divided the island for nearly three decades.

(25.07.2003)

It was the latest bid by Denktash to boost confidence after U.N.-backed peace talks with Greek Cypriots fell apart in March. The veteran leader was widely blamed for the collapse of the peace process ahead of the island's entry into the EU next year.

"We have given notice in a letter sent today to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan that Turkish Cypriot military officials are prepared to meet to discuss the clearing of mines in Nicosia and surrounding regions," Denktash said in a statement.

The U.N. office in Nicosia said on Thursday 48 minefields are strewn within the buffer zone, and experts say further mines can be found nearly a half-kilometre deep on each side.

Denktash said clearing the anti-personnel and anti-tank mines would improve security for Cypriots crossing the U.N.-patrolled "Green Line" bisecting the island since his administration opened border posts in April.

Hundreds of thousands of Cypriots have since ventured to places off limits since 1974, when Turkey invaded the north in response to a Greek Cypriot coup aimed at union with Greece.

Turkey still keeps some 30,000 troops in the north and is the only country to recognise Denktash's administration. The rest of the international community considers the Greek Cypriot government in the south the sole legitimate authority.

"This is an important military confidence-building measure ... and will be an additional effort to help reach a comprehensive settlement," Denktash said of the mine initiative.

The U.N. and European Union have welcomed Denktash's efforts to improve confidence since March but insist the measures are no substitute for a final settlement based on a U.N. blueprint.

Denktash has said Annan's peace plan is dead. His rival in the south, Cypriot President Tassos Papadopoulos, has indicated he is unwilling to return to talks unless Denktash accepts the U.N. plan as a basis for negotiations.

Von: 25 July 2003, Reuters. All rights reserved.

<<< zurück zu: News

© 2016 Landmine.de