



THE PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Statement by H.E. Mr Demetris Christofias
President of the Republic of Cyprus
at the
General Debate of the 63rd Session of the
General Assembly of the United Nations

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Mr. President,

I wish first to extend to you sincere congratulations on your election as President of the 63rd session of the General Assembly of the United Nations and to also express appreciation for the work done by your predecessor Mr. Srgjan Kerim.

I would like also to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the work of the Organisation and welcome his comprehensive approach to threats as well as his focus on recently emerged challenges.

It is an honour for me to address the General Assembly for the first time as the President of the Republic of Cyprus. Maintaining the effectiveness of multilateral diplomacy and strengthening the relevance of the United Nations is one of the cornerstones of the foreign policy of Cyprus since its Independence in 1960.

Mr. President,

The United Nations is important to the international community and it is particularly important to Cyprus.

It is an essential institution for our global survival and for the further development of humanity in a balanced and fair way in increasingly difficult conditions. Our peoples look to the United Nations as the best forum for addressing global problems such as poverty, climate change, rising energy and food prices, diseases, natural disasters, human rights abuses and many other pressing global problems. Either we do things together in a collective, coordinated way or the problems will persist and become even less manageable.

This week two vitally important issues are being given particular attention, namely the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and special needs for Africa. I applaud the focus being given to both, highlighting the imperative for collective action by the International Community. We must however match our words with deeds.

Mr. President,

Cyprus emerged from colonialism as an impoverished independent state in 1960. Its prospects did not seem good. Short on natural resources, suffering persistent, recurring droughts, a small island state with the inherent problems of distance from major markets, did not augur well for the young Republic. But we worked hard to redress the balance against us and managed to achieve growth and economic development.

The Turkish invasion of 1974 was a major economic and human catastrophe. One third of our people became refugees in their own country. But we persevered to overcome this disaster. We provided the refugees not only with the means for survival but also with the means for economic re-activation. Our experience engenders solidarity for all those who are struggling for their survival and their own development.

Cyprus is firmly committed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and maintains an emphasis on Africa in its overseas development assistance projects. Our approach is to focus on a small number of countries concentrating our efforts on infrastructural development in the health and education sectors.

Cyprus gradually intensifies its efforts by increasing the level of assistance to additional countries.

Mr. President,

Small states have higher stakes in multilateral diplomacy and in a fair and functional system of collective security based on the principles of sovereign equality and respect of territorial integrity.

There is no clearer example of this than Cyprus. From the earliest days of its independence, Cyprus was forced to appeal to the world community for support in order to defend and preserve its independence, its sovereignty and its territorial integrity. It became a victim of foreign interference which sowed the seeds for domestic problems for the new state. These difficulties were exploited in the service of strategic interests alien to our independence and our territorial integrity. The culmination was the military coup instigated by the military Junta of Athens and the Turkish military invasion of July-August 1974.

But Cyprus survived. The will of the international community for Cyprus to survive is found in the plethora of Security Council and General Assembly Resolutions, regrettably most of them not implemented. But the moral support and resolute stance provided Cyprus with the sword and shield that has ensured that it has remained and will continue to remain an undivided independent country, with a single sovereignty, single citizenship and single international personality.

In addition, the United Nations Resolutions for Cyprus contain two other elements. They provide for a process of negotiations in the form of a Good Offices Mission of the Secretary-General and --very importantly-- they define the legal/political framework on which the discussions for the federal architecture of the Cyprus state will be built. Both of these elements are crucial and our success in the new effort which is beginning now--I firmly believe-- will depend on respecting these essential conditions.

As regards the process, Good Offices Mission of the Secretary-General means negotiations in which the Cypriots themselves are the principal players. They are the owners of the process. The Cypriots themselves must build the state they envision for their society. The role of the Secretary-General and of the international community is to assist and to support. Good Offices is not arbitration. It is not mediation. Recent experience has shown that any attempt to impose -- even to import -- non-Cypriot inspired and improvised models will meet with rejection by the Cypriot people.

The relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions are also important for the new effort because they provide the legal political framework within which the effort must move. This framework prescribes a bizonal, bicomunal federation with single international personality, single indivisible sovereignty and single citizenship. The federal institutions will embody the principle of political equality as defined by relevant UN Security Council resolutions not as numerical equality but as effective participation of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities in all organs of the federal state.

It is important to remind ourselves that a bizonal, bicomunal federation has been the only mutually agreed basis dating back to 1977 and reaffirmed as recently as a few weeks ago. It represents a compromise and indeed the only possible compromise on which a political arrangement can be built. Relevant Resolutions of the Security Council as well as the Constitution of Cyprus exclude partition, secession or union with any other country.

The kind of solution we agree to must not only take into account our history and international legality. It must also take into account what kind of society we are and what kind of society we want to bequeath to our children. In this society, all Cypriot children must be born free and equal. Human rights and the fair satisfaction of human needs must take precedence to strategic considerations dictated by political expediencies.

Mr. President,

On September 3, a new intensive effort started with the aim of overcoming the impasses of the past and achieving progress that would lead to the reunification of Cyprus under mutually-agreed terms and to the withdrawal of foreign troops after 34 years of division and foreign occupation. For this effort to succeed what is needed is political will on the part of the Cypriots, but also the positive engagement of other important players which for historical reasons have been part of the problem and need to become part of the solution.

For my part, I want to assure you from this podium that my political will to do what is necessary to solve the problem is firm and deep-rooted. My origins are in the popular movement of Cyprus which prides itself of a long history of struggles and indeed sacrifices in defence of friendship, cooperation and peaceful coexistence between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. On the other hand, I am one of those Cypriots that were deeply and directly affected by the foreign military invasion of 1974 because I myself and my family are internally displaced persons, refugees in our own country.

The role of the Cypriots is to agree on what they want. This we must try to achieve with the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community, Mehmet Ali Talat. And I believe that we could achieve it.

But this is not enough for achieving a solution. Turkey should contribute to the process in a positive way. Turkey still maintains over 40,000 troops and tens of thousands of settlers in Cyprus and can, without doubt, determine the outcome of the issues under discussion. We believe that the solution should benefit everybody and will benefit everybody. It would allow the Cypriots, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, to live together and work together in an independent prosperous country, within the family of the European Union, without the presence of foreign armies and illegal colonists under conditions of security and respect for their identity and their rights.

Mr President,

Our world faces many problems which are increasingly becoming more complex. It is our conviction that these problems can be solved and new threats can be prevented only through effective multilateral collective action.

Peace must prevail. A true peace based on respect of international law and not the right of might. A response to the problem of international terrorism will only be effective if our world becomes less unjust. Without tackling hunger and poverty, without solving regional disputes on the basis of international legitimacy and without a more fair distribution of global wealth, peace can not grow firm roots.

The United Nations is an achievement of our fathers and a necessary tool for insuring a more stable, fair and prosperous world. Ultimately the UN is only as successful as we, the member states, allow it to be.

I wish our community of nations a successful 63rd General Assembly session.

Thank you.