



Press Statement by the Secretary-General on arrival in Cyprus

26 February 2003

I am delighted to arrive in Cyprus at this decisive moment. When I came in mid-May, I sensed a deep longing to bring an end to the longstanding dispute that has torn this beautiful island apart for decades.

This afternoon I will be seeing Mr. Papadopoulos, the incoming Greek Cypriot leader, and Mr. Denktash, the Turkish Cypriot leader, in separate meetings. Before that I will call on Mr. Clerides, who has played a distinguished part in public life here for more than 40 years and whose term in office will shortly come to an end. I expect to meet them together tomorrow morning. Tomorrow I will also be meeting other political party leaders, both Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot.

The Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots were given a draft agreement on 11 November 2002. This was revised on 10 December, in the hope that they could agree to it before the Copenhagen European Council. That opportunity slipped by. This afternoon, I will give them another revision which I hope to discuss with them tomorrow. Its contents should not come as a surprise to them: My Special Adviser, Alvaro de Soto, and his team, have gone over the elements which we proposed to change with all concerned in the past week or so. A preview of the proposed changes was given to them in writing this last Sunday.

I pray that the leaders, in their wisdom, will come to an agreement in the coming few days. This will allow Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to go to the polls on 30 March, in separate simultaneous referenda, so as to bring into being a new state of affairs in Cyprus. If this happens, on 16 April, the European Union Treaty of Accession will be signed on behalf of a re-united Cyprus.

I have come to Cyprus to tell you that the entire international community is hoping and praying that a Cyprus settlement, so long delayed, is at last at hand. I believe very strongly that the offer on the table is fair and balanced; and that a settlement would bring great benefits to the two sides, to the motherlands, to the region, and to the world.

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I hope that Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots alike understand the urgency of the task at hand. It is no exaggeration to say that you have a rendez-vous with destiny.