



STATEMENT ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE SPOKESMAN OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

ON OUTCOME OF REFERENDA IN CYPRUS

[delivered by Secretary-General's Special Advisor for Cyprus, Alvaro de Soto, in Nicosia on 24 April]

The Secretary-General notes the outcome of the separate simultaneous referenda held today in Cyprus on the settlement plan finalized on 31 March 2004. Since it was approved in the Turkish Cypriot referendum but not in the Greek Cypriot referendum, the Foundation Agreement will not enter into force.

The Secretary-General respects the outcome of the two referenda. He knows that for many Cypriots the decision how to vote was a difficult one. The goal of the effort over the last four and a half years has been to bring about reunification so as to enable a reunited Cyprus to join the European Union. That goal has not been achieved. A unique and historic chance to resolve the Cyprus problem has been missed.

The Secretary-General intends to give careful thought to the implications of today's result. Meanwhile, Cyprus will remain divided and militarized as it accedes to the European Union, and the benefits of a settlement will not be realized.

The Secretary-General applauds the Turkish Cypriots, who approved the plan notwithstanding the significant sacrifices that it entailed for many of them. He regrets that the Turkish Cypriots will not equally enjoy the benefits of EU membership as of 1 May 2004, but he hopes that ways will be found to ease the plight in which the people find themselves through no fault of their own.

Together with a broad cross-section of the international community, the Secretary-General remains convinced that the settlement plan put to the two sides in today's referenda represents a fair, viable and carefully balanced compromise--one that conforms with the long-agreed parameters for a solution and with the Security Council's vision for a settlement, and meets the minimum requirements of all concerned. Clearly, a large majority of the Greek Cypriot electorate did not share that judgment today. He hopes that they may nevertheless arrive at a different view in the fullness of time, after a profound and sober assessment of today's decision. For a settlement to the long-standing Cyprus problem would benefit the people of Cyprus, as well as the region and the wider international community.

The Secretary-General will report to the Security Council in due course. The Council may wish to evaluate the outcome and its implications.

The Secretary-General appreciates the strong backing that the plan received from many political figures on both sides. He is grateful that Greece and Turkey, the Security Council, the European Union and the broader international community stood ready to throw their support behind the Cypriots and work to ensure full implementation. Above all, he is thankful to his Special Adviser and his outstanding team, as well as for the dedication of many people from all walks of life in Cyprus, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots alike, who struggled for reunification and reconciliation.

Nicosia, 24 April 2004

Questions & Answers

Question: Mr. de Soto, many people in the Greek Cypriot political community have been suggesting that in six months time they could go back to the UN, and I understand renegotiate the plan. What do you say to that?

Well, all I can do is repeat what the Secretary-General's Spokesman said. He hopes that the Greek Cypriots may arrive, despite the decision that they took today, at a different view in the fullness of time after a profound and sober assessment of today's decision. Beyond that I shall bite my tongue.

Question: So there are no plans to renegotiate the plan as it stands at the moment?

No.

Question: Are you disappointed [inaudible]?

Answer: I am very pleased that the people of Cyprus have at last had the opportunity to exercise their judgment.

Question: Is this the end of your stay in Cyprus?

Answer: I will be paying farewell calls at the beginning of the week on my several interlocutors. And then I will return to New York to report to the Secretary-General. And the office that we had set up in which many people worked will be closing down in the coming weeks. I should add here that my team and I have greatly enjoyed working with the Cypriots, and that we are grateful for the support that we have received from so many of them and from their leaders as well.

Question: What is your view on the possibility of lifting the embargo imposed on the Turkish Cypriots at the moment or in the near future?

Answer: I stand by what I said in my statement. We hope the some way will be found to ease the plight in which they find themselves.

Question: On 15 June the Security Council will reconsider the deployment of the Cyprus peacekeeping force. What are the decisions after the outcome of the referendum?

Answer: Well let's deal with this first. This is a matter for decision of the Security Council. The Secretary-General will be presenting a report to the Security Council on that matter subsequently.

Question: What do you think led to this outcome on the Greek side?

Answer: I am tempted to speculate on that but I am going to bite my tongue. I am going to present a report to the Secretary-General when I get back and we will be stepping back a bit and reflecting on that.

Question: When will you go back to New York?

Answer: Sometime next week.

Question: Do you think it was a fair referendum?

Answer: I will bite my tongue on that as well. The United Nations did not have a mandate to observe either the referendum itself or the run-up to it.

Question: You refer to a fullness of time, the fullness of time, and the Greek Cypriots may come around with the fullness of time. Does this suggest that the referendum was rather rushed?

Answer: Well, there is no doubt that the time was considerably less than would have been desirable and that was not the fault of the Greek Cypriot people certainly. I am not saying whose fault it was but it is true [inaudible].

Question: Did the United Nations rush it somewhat?

Answer: Well, the goal that was set from the beginning was to bring about a settlement so that Cyprus could accede to the European Union reunited. So it had to be completed before the 1st of May in order to be successful. Alas, it hasn't been.

Question: If the AKEL party had been on board - and they indicate they might have been if they got security guarantees through the United Nations - is there any chance that those guarantees may come through without the [inaudible] vote that Russia said will be [inaudible]. But the fact is the only difference is that the [inaudible] ... passes a resolution for another referendum in the future?

Answer: There will be time to reflect on that in the fullness of time.

Question: Will there be time to reflect on whether or not the plan is indeed valid in the fullness of time? If 75% of the Greek Cypriots say they are against it and the majority of them say that they want to reunify with the Turkish Cypriots, then there must be something wrong with the plan?

Answer: Well, that is your interpretation and I take exception to it. I have already made clear I have some other ideas on the subject but I will bite my tongue.

Question: You have been working with both sides for a considerable time. Mr. Verheugen the other day said that he felt cheated by one side. Do you share his feelings?

Answer: Mr. Verheugen can speak for himself. I can speak for myself but this evening I am biting my tongue.

It must be bleeding.

Question: Do you have any regrets on your involvement in this negotiation?

Answer: Yes actually, I do have a regret. At about 2 am on the night of the 31st of March, following several sleepless nights, I fell into a trap set by a clever journalist and returned a rather snappy answer to a question that gave the impression that I was insensitive to the plight of people who have been dispossessed from their homes in 1974. I apologize to them this evening for having given that impression. The whole plan was conceived for people, for human beings. If you look at the squiggly lines in the map that is contained in the plan, you will see that it is designed to accommodate people, to get as many people back to their homes, and to dislocate other people for demographic reasons in the lowest numbers possible. Of course I feel their plight and their suffering, particularly tonight since they will not be able to recover to their homes.

Question: By virtue of the fact that the plan was passed and approved on the other side, does it become a frozen for future purposes?

Answer: Let's reflect on that in the fullness of time.
Thank you very much.