

Statement by H.E. Mr Abdelwaheb Abdallah
Minister of Foreign Affairs
63rd session of the General Assembly
of the United Nations

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Mr President,

Allow me, at the outset, to express to You and to the friendly Republic of Nicaragua, our sincere congratulations on your election President of the 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly. We are convinced that your diplomatic ability, talent and skills will help ensure the success of this session and achieve the objectives to which we all aspire.

I also would like to express our appreciation to Mr Srgjan Kerim for his excellent work and valuable contribution to the smooth conduct of the 62nd session.

Our sincere thanks also go to Mr Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, for his generous efforts to further promote the work of our Organization and enhance its performance in addressing the various issues of importance to our countries and peoples.

Mr President,

The choice of “The World Food Crisis and its Impact on Poverty and Hunger” as the main theme of the general debate reflects the importance of this issue and the growing awareness of all countries of its gravity and of the need to join efforts in finding efficient solutions to contain its impacts and reduce its consequences on national economies, particularly those of developing and poor countries, and on the increasing rates of poverty and hunger in the world.

It is in this context that the role assumed by the United Nations takes its crucial importance in addressing these issues and in striving to achieve a better balance in international relations and a higher degree of solidarity, justice and equality. This requires enhancing the Organization’s reform process and consolidating its capacity to keep pace with international developments.

During the past period, the world situation has been characterized by an increasing pace of change, which has disrupted international balances and overturned the prevailing development equations. It has also generated many problems and difficulties which have impacted on the economies of many countries and on their development process. It has furthermore weakened their capacity to achieve progress and increased their vulnerability.

Moreover, and during the past period, the world has witnessed serious economic problems, consisting, in particular, in the excessive rise of oil and basic food products prices, thus threatening World food security and deteriorating the

purchasing power of many nations, which jeopardizes the objectives and orientations set by the Millennium Summit.

Facing this serious situation requires intensifying international efforts, through the adoption of development strategies based on the noble humanist dimensions of world solidarity.

In this context, Tunisia has called on international financial institutions and other organizations specialized in economy and trade to endeavor toward establishing and implementing agricultural and production policies that guarantee human food availability, which stands as a fundamental right recognized by human rights international instruments.

On this occasion, we renew our call for intensified efforts to operationalize the World Solidarity Fund established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2002 as a mechanism to address the issues of poverty and destitution in the world and to reduce disparities among peoples.

Mr President,

Keeping up with the deep changes on the international scene, which have generated new realities in international relations marked by various challenges and complexities, requires from us to consolidate the United Nations' capacity to act more efficiently. It also calls upon us to endeavor to reform this Organization, develop its structures, and enhance the role it is expected to play to alleviate the pressure of the current international situation, and to turn globalization into a process that helps guarantee peace and development for all peoples.

In this context, Tunisia supports all efforts and initiatives aimed at establishing new frameworks and mechanisms of action that can help find collective solutions to the common challenges posed in the vital fields of security, peace, development, the environment and food security, as part of an adequate approach to international relations founded on the complementarity between peace, security, and development. This, however, should be accompanied by a strengthened multilateral action on the basis of cooperation, solidarity, and a constructive dialogue among all countries.

Mr President,

The aggravation of the terrorism problem in the world, despite the efforts to contain it, reinforces our conviction of the need to unify the international approach to fight this scourge and find adequate solutions to it.

Tunisia has warned, since the early 1990s, the international community against the dangers of terrorism, and called for the adoption of a comprehensive and efficient approach that takes into consideration the root causes of this scourge. Today, we renew the call of H.E. President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to convene an international conference, under the United Nations auspices, in order to elaborate a code of conduct for the fight against terrorism, to which all parties shall commit themselves.

Mr President,

Climate change, and the resulting intensification of the problems of desertification, drought, and scarcity of drinking water, constitute today a looming threat to all humanity and a source of great concern for all.

While affirming the close link between the environment and development, and the crucial importance of promoting cooperation and solidarity to meet the challenges facing humanity in this field, we stress the need to include the concerns about the potential effects of climate change, particularly in the African and Mediterranean region, among the international community's priorities, as stated in the Tunis Declaration issued by the International conference on climate change held in Tunisia in November 2007.

We also underline, once again, the need to mobilize the financial resources necessary to promote research in the field of climate observation, meteorology, and the development of natural disaster early warning systems. This in addition to investment in reducing greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming.

Mr President,

We are convinced that the success of development efforts and the strengthening of cooperation among our countries depend on providing a secure and stable international environment. However, among the obstacles to the success of this endeavor, lie the intensification of tensions and conflicts and the persistence of unsettled problems.

In this regard, we reaffirm Tunisia's commitment to the values of peace and to the principles of international legality as the path to reaching just and lasting solutions to pending international issues. We also renew our determination to promote the values of moderation, tolerance, and mutual respect in relations among countries and peoples, and to establish bridges of communication and dialogue between all civilizations, cultures, and religions.

While reaffirming, in this context, Tunisia's position in support of the brotherly Palestinian People and its just cause, we renew our call to the international community, essentially the influential parties, and the Quartet in particular, to increase their effort in order to bring Israel to put an end to its aggressive practices and settlement activities. We call on them to intensify their efforts to reinvigorate the peace effort and facilitate the resumption of negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, on the basis of relevant international references, the Arab Peace Initiative, and the results of the Annapolis Conference with the aim of achieving a just, lasting, and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian Cause. Such a solution would guarantee the recovery by the Palestinian People of its legitimate national rights and the establishment of its independent State on its national territory, and the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories, including Syrian and Lebanese lands, and would provide security and stability for all peoples of the region.

We also call for joint regional and international efforts to address the deterioration security and humanitarian conditions in Iraq and help the brotherly Iraqi people to restore security and stability, enabling it to devote its energy to reconstruction efforts, while preserving its national and territorial unity.

We wish to take this opportunity to express our satisfaction for the positive developments that occurred in sisterly Lebanon, consisting in the election of the President of the Republic and the formation of the national unity government. We hope our Lebanese brothers will further strengthen this process for the sake of preserving Lebanon's security and stability.

Mr President,

Since the Change of November 7, 1987, and under the wise leadership of H.E. President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic, Tunisia has succeeded in accomplishing remarkable achievements in all fields, thanks to substantial reforms which have consolidated the democratic endeavor, promoted Human Rights protection mechanisms and culture and safeguarded public freedoms. These reforms enabled us to enlarge the scope of consultation and participation of the various components of civil society in identifying major orientations and determining crucial national options, within the framework of the rule of law and respect of institutions.

These reforms have also made it possible to achieve many of the Millennium Development Goals, which led to the improvement of living standards and the well-being for all categories of the Tunisian society. These achievements bear testimony to sound development choices and orientations implemented in Tunisia which have allowed it to hold an advanced position among the countries with the highest human development indicator. This has brought Tunisia the respect of international financial institutions and specialized UN agencies.

Throughout the various development plans, Tunisia persevered in its endeavor for development and modernization, in order to strengthen its capacity to keep up with international changes and actively contribute to building a world of peace and security and establishing more balanced and solidarity-based international relations.

Mr President,

Keen on achieving a higher degree of integration within its regional and international environments, Tunisia is pursuing its action, on the bilateral and multilateral levels, to open up on the various spaces to which it belongs, and to develop its political relations with sisterly and friendly countries and with regional and international organizations. It also endeavors to enlarge and diversify the scope of cooperation with them, in order to raise these relations to the level of an effective partnership based on mutual respect and common interests.

In this context, Tunisia firmly believes that the Arab Maghreb Union remains a strategic and crucial choice for all peoples of the region. Thus, it spares no effort, in cooperation and coordination with the other sisterly Maghreb countries, to accelerate the completion of this edifice, establish its institutions, and activate its structures.

Tunisia is also keen on promoting joint Arab action and enhancing its capacity to interact with regional and international developments and to face up to the changes occurring in the region, as well as contributing to promoting the reform and modernization process in the Arab world, in conformity with the decisions of the 2004 Arab Summit in Tunis.

On the African level, Tunisia is keen on strengthening and diversifying its cooperation with sisterly African countries through its contribution to achieving peace and security on the Continent, participating in UN peacekeeping forces, or through developing of economic relations with sisterly African countries.

Based on its belief in the importance of joint African action and that the African Union is the ideal framework for addressing the Continent's issues and achieving the integration to which our peoples aspire, Tunisia reaffirms its strong determination to pursue the process decided within the framework of the African Union, aimed at completing the setting up and activation of its institutions, enhancing its role in conflict resolution on the Continent, and promoting the development process therein.

As to the Europe, Tunisia attaches a strategic importance to its relations with the European Union and is constantly endeavoring towards their development in all fields, in consecration of the solidarity-based partnership with EU countries, founded on dialogue, cooperation and mutual respect.

Furthermore , the building of the Euro -Mediterranean cooperation space remains one of Tunisia's priorities and one of the constant tenets of its foreign policy. In this regard, Tunisia has supported all initiatives and mechanisms that contribute to promoting peace, solidarity and development in the Mediterranean region, such as the Barcelona Process, the 5+5 Dialogue, and the Mediterranean Forum.

Tunisia was among the first countries to welcome the French initiative for the establishment of the « Union for the Mediterranean ». We are convinced that the future of this initiative rests on the principle of an effective partnership, which guarantees for the Southern Mediterranean countries an active participation in establishing the foundations of the Union and taking the decisions of concern to the region.

Mr President,

Facing the challenges posed by the new international situation and the deep changes taking place on the world scene requires that we all step up efforts to further anchor the noble universal principles and humanist values on which the United Nations was founded. It also requires perseverance in enhancing the process of reforming our Organization, in order to confer more efficiency on its work and ensure its active contribution to providing optimum international conditions that can help find collective solutions to common challenges and current international issues, meet our peoples' aspirations for stability, and provide propitious conditions for prosperity and well-being, within a context of cooperation and solidarity-based development.

Thank you for your attention.