

Check against delivery



REPUBLIC OF MALTA

PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE
REPUBLIC OF MALTA
TO THE
UNITED NATIONS

Statement by
The Hon. Dr. Joseph Muscat
Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta

at the

Sixty-ninth Session of the
United Nations General Assembly

United Nations Headquarters
New York

26 September 2014

249 East 35th Street
New York, N.Y. 10016

Phone: (212) 725-2345
Fax: (212) 779-7097
Email: malta-un.newyork@gov.mt

Mr. President,

I would first like to congratulate you on your election as President of the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I also wish to express my appreciation for the able manner in which the outgoing President has presided over this Assembly.

Allow me also to pay tribute to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon for his tireless commitment in the service of peace. I also thank the men and women serving the United Nations in the field. They do so often at great personal risk and their courage and dedication is a source of strength and inspiration for our Organization.

Fifty years ago Malta became an independent state.

That was the year when Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment in South Africa and when Martin Luther King received his Nobel Peace Prize.

For a small, nascent state such as Malta, it was a year of promise and new beginnings as it took its place among the members of the United Nations.

It is with a deep sense of pride that I stand before you today to note the role our country played over the last fifty years to uphold the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Time and again, this family of nations found a trusted and reliable partner in Malta, willing to contribute, in ways large and small, to the causes of international peace and security.

I will indeed mention just two.

The first is Malta's association with the Law of the Sea; a widely acknowledged role since we were instrumental in the launching of the international process that would eventually lead to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The second example comes shortly after, in 1988, when we were one of the first Member States to highlight the risks of climate change to the global community within the UN fora. At the time, it was an almost alien concept. Today climate change is one of the main items on the global agenda.

I pay tribute to Arvid Pardo and former President Censu Tabone, who piloted these events.

Evidently, our size did not determine our ambitions then.

Neither will it determine them now.

Mr. President,

We live in an increasingly uncertain world.

A world where the power balances, that we have known for the last decades, have started to shift.

What made sense yesteryear, may not continue to make sense in the future. Not that distant, unperceived future. But the future we can already see forming before our very eyes.

If you will allow me, I wish to share with you some thoughts by presenting you five challenges, five of many, that I feel, we the United Nations, need to face up to now.

The first challenge is undoubtedly the conflict in the Middle East.

We need a return to meaningful negotiations. And I stress the word 'meaningful'. The ongoing tit-for-tat; the culture of hatred and intolerance; the self-righteous proclamations and the recriminations are leaving nothing but death and destruction.

If you build walls around people, no wonder they will dig tunnels to escape.

The current frame of mind will lead nowhere.

Too many innocent civilians have died; too many children have been buried. We need statesmanship from the politicians on both sides to resolve this conflict. Risk takers and courageous negotiators must be willing to make the right choices. Not the most convenient choices. Not the most popular perhaps. But the most enduring ones. Those choices that bring change for peace.

Our second challenge must be the end of the ghastly war in Syria – a war that is fast becoming a forgotten conflict of major proportions.

Last year my country, like many others here, called for a stop to the atrocities.

Are we simply going to repeat this call this year as well?

Let us stop this humanitarian disaster which, as we know, is now morphing into the new threats we have heard so much about.

Security Council Resolution 2165 has demonstrated that we can act together, so let us act.

I call on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities under the Charter and to act urgently and decisively to bring an end to the bloodshed.

Which brings me to our third challenge, Mr. President.

As if we haven't yet learnt our lessons from Syria, as if we haven't yet realised what sectarian divisions can lead to, we are allowing the problems in Libya to continue almost unabated. We are fast witnessing a descent towards another forgotten conflict.

We need to help the Libyan people take their country forward. There is a bright future for Libya but the Libyans themselves need to find the hope to realize it and they can only begin to do that with the help of the international community. The United Nations can, and must, provide capacity-building and security to bring stability and prosperity.

Of course we are heartened to see the constructive role that the United Nations Support Mission in Libya is already playing. Yet immense challenges remain, particularly in restoring the country's security and law and order. The divisions are rooted in many causes but they can be overcome.

This cannot be allowed to continue further. The repercussions of this situation are severe not just for the Libyans themselves, not just for the immediate neighbours of Libya, but further afield. The international community cannot risk a takeover of this country by extremists.

Together with our international partners, especially our colleagues in the European Union, Malta continues to actively support the efforts of the Libyan people to move forward. We are providing all assistance within our means to aid the wounded. We will stand for dialogue and reconciliation in Libya. We will stand for peace and resolution. We will continue to draw attention to this festering wound. Our Libyan people deserve this.

Indeed, disarmament and national reconciliation are the pre-requisites for Libya to move forward. And the United Nations must be ready to answer calls for action from the Libyan people themselves.

The families, the children of Libya deserve a future. Freedom and justice for all Libyans can only be achieved if differences are resolved through consultation and compromise.

Mr. President,

Please allow me now to move to the fourth challenge facing the world today: the spread of extremism and intolerance.

We are living in a period of transnational allegiances that have seen the globalisation of hatred.

A period where extremists are increasingly interconnected through networks and inventions whose main aim should be progress and education.

A period where disenchanted youths are radicalised into movements that know no limits.

We need to look beyond the borders of our nation states and work together if we are to face up to the threats that the extremists are posing.

Nobody is immune from what is undoubtedly the biggest threat to world stability and peace.

Just as the horrendous carnage of two world wars led to a shift in our thinking, the reality we are living in now needs to force another shift.

We have to spread a culture of mutual understanding and humanity.

Not because it serves us, but because it serves our peoples. It serves our future as a global community.

Mr. President,

Clearly this area of the world, from the Mediterranean to the Middle East and beyond, is demanding our utmost attention.

People are being pushed to the brink. They are resorting to increasingly desperate measures. Men, women and children are risking their lives crossing conflict ridden zones; crossing hostile deserts. They are taking to the seas without realizing the dangers that await them.

As I did last year, I will reiterate that more attention must be focused on the plight of illegal immigrants in the Mediterranean. This is our fifth challenge.

Malta, with all its limitations, is doing its utmost to save lives. As is our neighbour and friend Italy.

Again I call on the international community to help us stop the great human tragedies that come with risky crossings across the Mediterranean. The receiving states of the waves of migrants cannot stand up to this challenge alone. No country in the world can solve the problem of illegal immigration alone. Just last week we witnessed yet another tragedy, which the UNHCR has described as “mass murder”.

Closer cooperation between the countries of origin, transit and destination is needed. The United Nations and its Agencies must help address its causes. Better governance, better resources and better development policies are needed. We need better enforcement mechanisms and stronger penalties to stop and punish human traffickers. We need better implementation of internationally agreed commitments. We need all this and more, and we need to remember to keep the wellbeing of all human beings themselves at the centre of our policy.

Mr. President,

As a Mediterranean country, Malta cannot but call for the world’s attention to these challenges that are threatening not just the security of the region, but also its development and growth. These threats are stopping the Mediterranean Sea basin from reaching its full potential - a potential that is just waiting to be unleashed if only weapons were traded for books, and hatred for education.

I will reiterate my strong conviction that the Mediterranean basin needs to be given our immediate attention – to once again become the bed of great civilisations; that cross-cultural haven where men of different beliefs and traditions, work and trade mingle in tolerance and tranquillity.

It has always been our belief that without peace in the Mediterranean, there cannot be peace in Europe. Today’s unprecedented levels of interconnectivity lead us to believe that peace in the Mediterranean is a pre-requisite for global stability.

Malta will continue to serve as a voice of reason, striving to unite the Mediterranean. Our only weapon is our historical and natural vocation for peace. Our resolve only grows stronger in such testing times.

Mr. President,

The challenges we face cannot stop us in our tracks.

We can address them if we truly believe in acting as *United Nations*.

A year from now, we will analyse the Millennium Development Goals and hopefully agree on Sustainable Development Goals for the 21st century.

It is with an effective Development agenda that we can face up to the causes of conflict in a sustainable manner, that we can overcome the poverty that contributes to illegal migration.

But we need to be ambitious.

Mr. President,

My country has over the last 50 years shown that it has been ambitious in favour of peace, progress and prosperity.

It has promoted and will continue to promote the broadest possible dialogue among the countries of our region.

I take pride in noting that only a few months back, Malta together with Algeria, France, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States, launched the International Institute for Justice and Rule of Law hosted in my country. This Institute will collaborate with the United Nations and other international and non-governmental organizations to provide training to lawmakers, the police, prosecutors, judges and prison officials to deal with terrorism and transnational crime with a general emphasis on the rule of law. We hope that this work will eventually serve as best practice for the benefit of the wider global community.

We are also fully engaged within the Commonwealth, which brings together a third of the world population, to help achieve convergence on some of the challenges that lie ahead, including the sustainable development goals and climate change. Indeed, the Commonwealth summit that will take place next year in Malta will serve as an ideal platform of discussion on these issues, especially ahead of the Paris Summit on climate change.

These are some of the ways in which Malta will continue to contribute to the fostering of peace and security in the world.

Mr. President,

Fifty years may seem like a long time.

But I can assure you that fifty years from now, my country will remain steadfast in its ambitions and in its determination in favour of peace and prosperity.

Malta will remain a proud member of the United Nations, a beacon of stability in the Mediterranean.

Thank you.