

4 October 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Dialogue with Civil Society**

Good afternoon friends and colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I just want to say ...
There can be no dialogue without civil society.

So I am delighted to see a full house. It shows commitment. And I look forward to seeing more of you this year.

Civil society is an important partner for UN Member States. It is your organizations that often work closest with communities and national governments. You are at the forefront of service delivery.

We appreciate your efforts and contributions.

It was important to me that we came together at the beginning of the 66th session of the General Assembly. Today's dialogue is an opportunity to exchange priorities and consider how we can be complementary in our efforts.

To begin, I would like to make some brief remarks about the role of the President of the General Assembly, as I understand some of you have questions on this. You may also be interested to learn about the four areas of focus that I have selected to guide our work this session. We will then open the floor for discussion.

The General Assembly is of course the world's chief deliberative and policymaking body. It represents all 193 Member States, who have an equal voice in global decision-making under the UN Charter.

The interests, concerns and views of such a large body are diverse and sometimes not in agreement.

My primary job as President is therefore as a mediator and a facilitator. I work closely with all Member States to help find common understanding. My aim is to promote consensus in intergovernmental negotiations.

The Membership has also requested that Presidents of the General Assembly organize thematic debates. These debates are an opportunity for Member States and key partners to meet in an informal setting to exchange ideas and lessons learned, and to advance issues of common concern.

The role of the President also involves many formal, ceremonial and diplomatic functions. One such function is to lead discussions in General Assembly meetings. Another is to enhance the visibility of the Assembly worldwide.

In approaching my responsibilities as President, and to help frame the Assembly's work this session, I have identified four themes. These are:

First, the peaceful settlement of disputes

Second, UN reform and revitalization

Third, improving disaster prevention and response

Fourth, sustainable development and global prosperity

In addition, for this year's General Debate I proposed the theme "The role of mediation in the peaceful resolution of disputes". In today's world, this topic is more relevant and urgent than ever.

I intend to hold informal meetings and retreats on these issues. Member States and partners will come together to further mutual understanding and consider how we can turn our words into actions.

To engage with the processes of the General Assembly, there are a number of important mechanisms available to civil society.

Regular interaction between civil society and my Office is most welcome.

One forum that has proven helpful in the past is civil society hearings. Here, civil society actors not only identify and report on situations of common concern. They also make recommendations that will be given due weight when decisions of the Membership are made.

You also have other forums for engagement. These include the work of the Assembly's Main Committees and events mandated by the Assembly, such as commemorative meetings.

And for the thematic debates that I will convene this session, I would warmly welcome the participation of civil society.

In closing these brief remarks, we are all deeply aware that our world is currently undergoing a period of profound change and uncertainty. The global environment poses new challenges to multilateralism. It requires the international community to work together and to find creative solutions.

Our progress will largely depend on the strength of our global partnership. My team- who is present here today- and I stand ready to work closely with you, to ensure that you play an integral role in this partnership.

I have also appointed a Special Coordinator for Civil Society, Mrs. Hanifa Mezoui. Mrs Mezoui is well acquainted with your community. She will follow up on the modalities of our cooperation, encouraging you to bring forward creative proposals.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to our discussion today.

Thank you very much.