

12 March 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the European Parliament**

The Honourable Mr. Elmar Brok, Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs,
The Honourable Ms. Michèle Striffler, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Development,
The Honourable Ms Barbara Lochbihler, Chair of the Sub-Committee on Human Rights,
Honorable Members,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my deep honour to address the European Parliament.

Let me express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Brok, for the invitation to address this distinguished audience.

I begin by telling you what I am sure you already know:

The world has reached a great impasse.

An over-burdened planet.

Many issues related to social, human rights, environmental and economic challenges, as well as security and stability.

Regions of the world in flux.

Whether we act now - and how we act - will change the course of history.

How we act in this moment will determine if the rights and freedoms of the world's peoples are protected.

How we act now will impact the destiny of the most vulnerable among our populations, and whether they emerge from poverty, or slide further back into it.

In a word, this is a critical moment for the international community.

We need to put aside our differences and think not only of our national interests.

We need to step up, for the good of humanity.

This is the moment for uniting in a truly global partnership.

I am confident that the international community can – and that you, Members of the European Parliament will – do what is right.

As major crises and challenges abound before us, it would be dishonest not to acknowledge that the United Nations has been put to the test.

We have been forced to honestly ask these questions:

Does the UN today remain the most relevant international body?

Does the UN still have the tools to respond effectively to the challenges of the 21st Century?

To both of these questions, I respond with a resolute, YES.

The United Nations is not only the most legitimate – but also, I would underscore, the most relevant international organization in the world.

Also, you would concur, no other organization can claim true universality as the UN does.

This universality is what makes the UN the unique, irreplaceable organization that it is.

This universality offers a legitimacy like no other to the international community's work.

Honourable members,

The yearning for universal values is as old as humankind.

Here in Europe, the Age of Enlightenment contribution which brought us all where we are today – women and men around the world deeply aspiring to a life of dignity, freedom, justice, full gender equality, and other universal values.

Today, we strive at the United Nations General Assembly to fulfill humankind's universal aspirations.

But it is not easy without our solidarity.

For, 193 countries implies 193 governments. 193 national economies. And how many cultures! How many national interests?

Yet, through trial and error, all 193 members of the Assembly work together and consensus is built, slowly but surely.

You may ask: Why am I saying all this? Why do I feel the need to reiterate the importance of the UN's work?

Well, because at this moment, the need for cooperation, for joint action, for partnership is greater than ever before.

In today's world, what affects one nation affects us all.

Common solutions to common problems define our time.

The European Union knows it to be a fact.

The European Union's emphasis on multilateralism and on respect for international law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, makes the EU one of the strongest allies of the UN.

The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty has made the European Union a more effective and proactive partner for the UN.

Indeed, the relationship between the European Union and the United Nations is stronger than ever before, it represents a good example of implementing chapter 8 of the UN charter.

My presence here illustrates that the United Nations and the European Union stand firm in their common resolve, in the face of so many daunting challenges.

I was particularly pleased that, under my Presidency, the first European Union statement was delivered by the President of the European Council at the High Level General Debate of General Assembly, last September.

The European Union's contribution as the largest financial contributor to the UN is also of fundamental importance to our operations, and for this I thank you.

I would also take this opportunity to welcome the strengthened role of the European Parliament since the signing of the Lisbon Treaty.

Europe needs a strong European Parliament.

You, represent the voices of Europe.

You, embody the people of Europe.

You, reflect the aspirations of Europeans.

In you, civil society has a strong ally and finds a force that the UN needs to face the challenges of our time.

For when the UN Charter speaks of “We the people of the United Nations”, it is of course talking about you, and all those you represent.

You, as Parliamentarians, have one of the most critical jobs: to translate international commitments into national legislation and policies.

This is key to ensuring the effectiveness of the resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly, thus making our work a reality.

As I did last November for the IPU hearing to support Member States in these efforts, this May I will hold a General Assembly plenary meeting with the participation of UN Member States, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

This debate will, among other things, address democratic accountability in the work of the UN, which I understand is also an important issue for your Parliament.

Honourable members,

Earlier in my remarks I spoke of the challenges facing the international community.

Let me address a few of these challenges that are of common concern to the UN and the EU.

The first is the Arab Awakening.

The historic shifts shaking the Arab world are one of the clearest expressions of the yearning for universal values the world has ever seen.

The yearning for freedom. For dignity. For equality. For justice.

In a word, the yearning for all – and I stress all – the universal values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We should affirm with a clear and strong voice that cultural differences should not prevent us from considering the progress of our societies, including Arab societies, at the dawn of the 21st Century.

In this context the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is valid for all.

Undoubtedly, the road to democracy is not always smooth. It can be bumpy, it can be uneven.

This is what we are witnessing in the countries changed or under ongoing changes by the Arab Awakening.

In this critical transitional phase, the international community must support the Arab world.

Europe, in particular, has a policy framework – the European Neighbourhood Policy – that should also apply to assistance to the Arab world as this moment of historic transformation.

I would pause here to focus on one country in the region whose transition has been of critical concern to us all.

That country is Syria.

The conditions in Syria are appalling.

Over 8000 people have been killed so far, including many women and children.

Violations of human rights are widespread and systematic.

Honourable members,

The international community has a responsibility to act.

After the inability of the Security Council to have a position on this issue, I organized a formal meeting of the General Assembly on the 13th of February.

At this meeting, Mrs Navi Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights, briefed the Member States about the worsening human rights situation in Syria.

Following that momentum, the General Assembly adopted by a large majority, a resolution supporting the Arab League's plan, and giving a joint mandate to the UN and LAS, in another form of cooperation under chapter 8 of the charter in the area of maintaining international peace and security.

I am pleased that the implementation of this resolution began quickly, with the appointment of former United Nations Secretary-General, H.E Mr. Kofi Annan, as the UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy for Syria.

I welcome this appointment and I wish him all success in his difficult mission. He has our full support.

Should the Security Council remain deadlocked, I can assure you that the General Assembly stands ready to take further action, with your support.

Together, we will do all we can for the people of Syria.

Speaking to you about the Arab region and the Middle East leads me to the question of Palestine.

I know that no one in this room needs to be convinced of the urgent need for a just and comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East.

A settlement resulting in two viable, sovereign and independent States - Israel and Palestine - living side by side in peace and security; that is what the UN charter underlines, also stressing the right to self determination.

The recent Jordanian initiative to re-launch talks between Israelis and Palestinians is encouraging, the Palestinian unity is also essential as we have witnessed recently. The parties must remain engaged in this process.

We also witnessed an historic moment in September, when President Mahmoud Abbas announced that he had submitted an application to the Secretary-General for the admission of Palestine to the United Nations.

After receiving this identical application, I immediately circulated it to the UN Membership.

It is no secret, that action on this application is now in a stalemate in the Security Council.

Should the Palestinians bring this issue to the General Assembly, the Assembly, with the support of peace loving countries, stands ready to assist, in a gradual approach.

Another interest of high importance to the European Union and the United Nations is the peaceful settlement of disputes. I support the efforts in this regard in the Middle East, the Iranian Nuclear Program, the Korean Peninsula and elsewhere.

As we come together in this complex, interconnected era – an era of dangers and high stakes - we, the international community, have a responsibility to practice what we preach.

And what we preach is peace and dignity, that peace, security and human rights are interconnected of mutual reinforcing.

We must find ways to employ peaceful tools for preventing and resolving conflicts.

And we must use these peaceful tools in a better and more cooperative manner than ever before.

This method should not only apply to traditional conflicts but should also apply to the tense stand-off involving Iran and the nuclear issue. Security and stability in the Gulf Region are essential for the security and stability of the whole world.

What are such tools for conflict resolution?

Mediation is one such tool, as stipulated in Chapter 6 of the UN Charter.

At present, international momentum is building around the peaceful settlement of disputes and mediation.

In June 2011, the General Assembly adopted its first-ever resolution on mediation.

I was very pleased that this adoption took place on the same day I was elected to lead the Assembly.

This fills me with pride, but also with an acute sense of responsibility to develop the mediation philosophy and strengthen its means of action.

This is why, last September, I suggested for the General Debate the theme “The role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes”.

I was overwhelmed by the positive response from world leaders to this theme, including from your countries.

I would like to witness a strong European participation in the upcoming high-level meeting of the General Assembly in New York that am convening next May, which will focus on the role of Member States in mediation.

Coming together, we can share ideas and experiences, and strengthen our collective resolve to act in peace, to spread peace, to live peace.

The Alliance of Civilizations is also one of the most original expressions of the international community’s efforts to offer the world a framework for bridging our differences and building common ground for a more peaceful and tolerant human family, in these times of historic transitions.

Launched at a time of dangerous tensions , the Alliance has proven its effectiveness as a new, UN path for peace.

It has contributed, through its various activities concerning women, youth, media and immigration, to a clear shift in the way we consider issues of “us” and “them.”

But the Alliance needs the support of Member States. The financial support of Member States to implement its activities for peace.

I appeal to you to be a voice on behalf of the Alliance, so that your governments understand the importance of this pathfor peace.

I appeal to you to call on your governments to strengthen the Office of the High Representative of the Alliance in the United Nations.

Through this institution, through the Office of the High Representative, we are given a chance to elevate the mediation philosophy to a high level of universality and effectiveness.

We should seize this historic opportunity.

Honourable Members,

I opened my remarks stressing before you the complexity of the numerous challenges we are facing at the dawn of the 21st Century, and our responsibility to act. The responsibility to protect was applied for saving the Libyan people.

I am confident that everyone in this room would support the revitalization of the UN General Assembly. But the question is: how can this be achieved in practice?

As President of the General Assembly, I could not stop at only guiding the substantive track of revitalization. So I decided to take practical decisions to give the Assembly the power it deserves through spectacular steps. I conducted field visits to Libya and Somalia along with the UN Secretary General, and acted through my legitimate authority to help the Syrian people. These are examples that I am willing to build on to revitalize the UNGA.

You will bear with me, I hope, if I do not stop where I have brought you until now.

There are so many other issues that require our attention.

When, as President of the General Assembly, I ponder the agenda of the Assembly and see hundreds of items that require our attention, I am humbled.

Let me then continue briefly with you here, but focusing on some of the issues that I think resonate even more with your concerns as Parliamentarians of Europe.

Piracy; counter-terrorism efforts and the European role; the state of the world economy.

Piracy and counter-terrorism – these are the ills in the inter-connected world in which we live today.

More freedom, but more risks.

How to increase our freedoms and diminish, or eliminate, the risks.

This is the challenge that both the United Nations and the European Union face.

Close cooperation between our two organizations is necessary if we want to overcome these difficulties of free societies.

Concerning terrorism in particular, the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy offers an important framework for cooperation.

Honourable Members,

You will agree with me that there is no full freedom if the basic needs of shelter, food, health, education are not met.

But for our world, to provide what is necessary to fulfill these needs, there must be justice in the world economic system.

There must be sustainable development. For although the resources are plenty, they are depleting gradually and might be dangerously lacking if we are not wise and more careful in their use.

The world economy needs a constructive message to create a healthy atmosphere, conducive to overcome the current economic situations. In this regard, am convening next May a high level meeting of the General Assembly, on the “State of the World Economy” , where I look forward for a constructive participation by the EU.

The upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – Rio+20 – is an historic opportunity for the international community to think through the tremendous challenges humanity faces in reconciling the needs for justice for all, dignity for all, and respect for our planet.

The European Union has a chance to bring to bear its tremendous capabilities, including its vast and strong experience in resource-management and distribution.

European experience in the environmental field, in particular, can be a great asset in the Rio discussions.

I urge you, the voice of the people, to encourage your governments to be as involved but also as forthcoming as possible to make Rio+20 a success, including by enabling the participation of LDCs and LLDCs.

It is our obligation – yours and ours – to give our generation, our children and future generations, a chance to be fed, sheltered, healthy educated – to be happy and full citizens of the world.

Distinguished members,

Forgive me for having retained your attention for perhaps too long. But how could I miss the opportunity to seek in you the partner and ally that the United Nations needs so very much in these difficult times?

I am confident that the UN can count on your support.

I hope that the UN and the European Union partnership will continue to be as strong as humanity requires.

Thank you.