



MALTA

STATEMENT BY

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GENERAL DEBATE

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**Madam President
Secretary-General
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen**

I would like to congratulate you on your election to the Presidency of the Sixty-First Session of the General Assembly. I am confident that your efforts will ensure a successful outcome of this Session. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the outgoing President, His Excellency Jan Eliasson who over the past twelve months the Assembly has been working on the successful implementation of many of the major reform tasks agreed at the Summit last year.

The theme chosen by our new President for this year's session 'Implementing a Global Partnership for Development' strikes at the heart of the challenges facing mankind today. It also reflects the emphasis made in the Summit that development, peace and security and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. Sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental aspects constitutes a key element of the overarching framework of United Nations activities.

We support that approach and, convinced in the ripple effects of development policies that benefit all mankind, urge the General Assembly to strengthen attention on development issues.

Poverty eradication and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the priority of this decade. In this regard, the 2006 United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report indicates that certain regions in the world have progressed much less than others:

- Extreme poverty remains a daily reality for more than 1 billion people who subsist on less than \$1 a day.¹**
- Whereas Asia leads the way in reducing poverty rates, the number of poor in Africa is rising².**
- In terms of per-capita income, eighteen out of the twenty poorest countries in the world are African.**
- Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest poverty rate in the world³ and the situation of chronic food insecurity has not improved over the last decade.**
- Four-fifths of armed conflicts occur in Africa and Asia.**

Clearly "There can be no development without security and no security without development".⁴

¹ Report to the UN Secretary General. Investing in Development – A practical plan to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. 2005

² United Nations. 2005. The Millennium Development Goals Report. New York.

³ United Nations. 2005. The Millennium Development Goals Report.

⁴ The EU Strategy document on development cooperation

These realities of poverty, of conflict, of insecurity are at the root of the phenomenon of mass migration from Africa to Europe along the major routes into the Canaries and mainland Spain in the east and into Malta and Italy in the Central Mediterranean.

This lack of development, security and good governance has a direct effect on a country such as my own which already at 1200 persons per square kilometer is one of the most highly densely populated countries in the world. In addition it is a small island state with a small population of 400,000 inhabitants and a small territory.

The burden of such underdevelopment and lack of security in Africa, sub-Saharan Africa in particular, therefore is being over-intensely borne by my country which is suffering real hardship as thousands of illegal migrants reach our shores.

The UNHCR 2005 statistics place Malta as the country which had the second highest number of asylum applications in contrast with a 15.6% decrease in asylum applications across the rest of the European Union.

We urge the United Nations and its agencies to address holistically with vigour and with urgency the issue of mass illegal immigration. In doing so, all the countries of world are called to combat criminal organisations which, across frontiers, are taking advantage of the aspirations of human beings who have lost all hope.

The rule of law must be respected. International obligations undertaken by countries in accordance with public international law must be honoured. Ignoring or insufficiently addressing this phenomenon of illegal immigration puts at risk the hard-acquired rights of genuine refugees and persons who are to be protected by humanitarian status under international law.

I therefore call this General Assembly and the United Nations as a whole, in particular UNHCR, to give their full support particularly to those countries which, like Malta, have an inherent fragility arising from density of population and smallness of territorial size in combating illegal immigration and in addressing the hardship which they undergo as countries of destination.

Malta needs support, including from UNHCR, in the resettlement of refugees and persons with a humanitarian status. It needs support in the financial burden it undertakes to provide for the basic needs of the illegal immigrants on its soil. It needs support internationally in combating the criminal organisations that are financially benefiting from illegal immigration while putting the lives of the immigrants at risk.

No country can tackle such an overwhelming phenomenon on its own. Illegal immigration needs a holistic approach internationally stretching from combating criminal organisations particularly in the countries of origin and of transit, from the strengthening of border control, to the promotion of good governance, economic development, and the rule of law, to the resettlement of refugees and

persons with humanitarian status and to the return of illegal immigrants to their countries of origin and transit and their reintegration in society.

In this holistic approach, we must also take into consideration the special characteristics of some more particularly vulnerable countries which have found themselves on the routes of migration between Africa and Europe and which, as countries of destination, are carrying a burden far greater than they can bear.

This issue was examined in detail during the High level Dialogue in Migration and Development which took place last week. Malta, which took an active part in this dialogue, looks forward to greater engagement of the countries of origin, transit and destination and looks forward to the EU-AU High Level Conference on Migration scheduled to be held in Tripoli, Libya before the end of this year. This engagement, which should have the active support of international organisations operating in this field, continues the process of dialogue which was successfully undertaken in the Rabat Conference last July. It can also serve as effective follow-up to the recent UN Dialogue meeting.

Madam President,

In focusing on development issues, we must emphasise the need for development to be sustainable, to respect the environment and to take into account the rights of future generations, children, youth and the yet unborn.

Development does not mean a 'free-for- all' attitude in the exploitation of earth's bountiful resources. There must be sustainable development that allows our forests to regenerate, our air to be pure and the seas to be free of pollution.

Climate change, global warming, are not issues which can be relegated to intellectual exercises: positive political action is required to address the problems of global warming and to avoid an exacerbation of the consequences of lack of care for the environment. As some dramatic experiences have already shown, the consequences of lack of respect for the planet and its environmental balances have been particularly borne by the world's poor whether in developing or in developed economies.

A concerted effort by all mankind is therefore required in this regard and the United Nations is the appropriate forum to address such issues affecting all countries as the fragility of our planet and its eco-system put on all of us a greater responsibility to act rapidly and together.

Madam President,

A global partnership for development needs to proceed in peace and stability. However, in our world today, global peace and security are constantly threatened by destructive and violent events.

In this regard, we must pay particular attention to the prolonged impasse that has thwarted the work of the Conference on Disarmament. This impasse is endangering those very multilateral mechanisms which have been created to foster

peace, security and co-operation. Member States of the Conference have a grave responsibility towards all UN Member States in assisting humanity to face the challenges proffered by non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control. As stated by the Secretary-General in his address to the Conference on Disarmament in last June: "With political will, this Conference can reclaim its former mantle and generate tangible benefits that could shape the course of history." This is a challenge for us all.

As is a challenge for us all to maintain all our efforts in the resolution of conflicts even if they seem to persist over long periods of time and notwithstanding many initiatives for peace by the international community.

The recent conflict in Lebanon was a tragic reminder of how easily a population can slide rapidly back into a conflict situation scenario. Today, the clouds have lifted a little so that new rays of hope can break through and we wish well that country that can constitute a unique laboratory for democratic and cultural pluralism living in a peaceful society in the Middle East.

In that region, the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains elusive. Fatalism is not an option. The international community, through the United Nations and other mechanisms such as the Quartet must retain a concerted and determined effort to find a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to this long-festering conflict which has a bearing on all other issues in the Middle East and in a wider global context. We welcome the intensive and frank debate which took place last week in the Security Council on this issue.

Malta respects and supports the aspirations of the Palestinian people for nationhood and dignity, and in equal measure respects and supports the aspirations of the Israeli people to live in peace within secure borders. These two aspirations are mutually compatible and achievable through peaceful and just means. A solution can only be achieved through a strict and abiding respect for the rules and norms of international law including humanitarian law.

On the ground, the continuing and increasingly deteriorating humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people is an intolerable burden on the international conscience. We must acknowledge and applaud the sterling work being carried out by UNRWA's Commissioner-General Ms Abu Zajd and all the dedicated Staff of the Agency for assisting the refugee population in no less than 58 refugee camps of Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, where one-third of the Palestine refugees live.

Madam President,

The international community needs to keep on strengthening its tools to address natural emergencies wherever they occur in the world, in a spirit of solidarity with nations and human beings. In this regard, the decision taken earlier this year, as a follow up to that year's Summit, on the revitalization and upgrading of the Central Emergency revolving fund is an important step forward. In this context, the role of the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), under the able leadership of Under-Secretary-General Jan

Egeland, continues to be a crucial mechanism in dealing with the co-ordination needed to strengthen humanitarian responses to natural disasters and complex emergencies.

The tragic experience of the December 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami have galvanised efforts to plot the outlines of an international early warning system across all oceans. That experience, and its aftermath, however, also shows that much still remains to be done to respond more rapidly, efficiently and effectively to natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies.

In this context, I note with great interest the valuable work done so far by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Inter-governmental Co-ordination Group for the Tsunami Early Warning and Mitigation System in the North-eastern Atlantic, the Mediterranean and Connected Seas (ICG/NEAMTWS). Located at the centre of the Mediterranean, and fully aware of the havoc that a tsunami would cause in the basin, Malta calls for the speeding up of the implementation of a Mediterranean tsunami early warning and mitigation system. This goal needs to be achieved in the shortest time frame possible. We are prepared to play a proactive role together with other states in the region in the establishment of a fully functioning tsunami warning system.

In such phenomena, not just regional but full global coverage is essential to the success of the system. This Assembly should be examining what needs to be done to achieve this in the shortest time possible. In particular, recent smaller tsunami phenomena which, however, also claimed lives, have shown that it is not only important for countries to have early warning systems which are inter-linked. It is equally crucial to transmit the early warning received by a country immediately to the population on the beaches and in the most vulnerable coastal areas, and to have in place crisis management mechanism in place which can accelerate evacuation to safety. This requires the setting of international warning transmission standards across the globe which, if effectively implemented, can save lives. Malta believes that this should also be a common task for the international community as a whole and calls on the international community to immediately consider the best means to respond to the Tsunami experiences with appropriate legal and other instruments that address the need for standards of transmission of early warnings to the population in the most vulnerable areas in all the countries of the world. The setting of international standards of preparation for such a phenomenon as the tsunami can provide countries with an appropriate up-to-date measuring stick and continued upgraded preparation.

Madam President,

The international community needs multilateralism. The process of institutional reform is another necessary and important component of the efforts to wards enhancing effective multilateralism. Over the past months some slow progress has been marked in the follow up action to the decisions taken at last year's summit in this regard. We are all conscious of the continuing efforts which need to be taken at this new session of the General Assembly on various aspects of institutional reform, including the most sensitive one relating to the enlargement and reform of

the Security Council. This matter now gains in urgency and impasses should be broken by flexibility and openness to the search for common ground.

A new Secretary General will be taking the reins of this organization in the new year. The person elected will need all our encouragement and support to fulfill the vital and demanding task of this unique office. To the outgoing Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, we express our immense sense of gratitude and admiration for the way in which he has conducted his work over the last ten years and for his total dedication to the cause of peace and the international rule of law.

Madam President,

The cause of peace and the international rule of law is threatened daily by cultural and religious incomprehension. The alliance of civilizations, mutual respect and tolerance, acceptance of the other and of diversity, peaceful co-existence and cooperation, dialogue and education, are the means which the international community has at its disposal to counteract the ugly phenomena of extremism and fanaticism.

We cannot ignore this threat to peace and stability, a threat which is further confounded by poverty and mass migration and by the need to strengthen further multilateralism as a means of world governance.

In this context, we need to keep in mind the general without losing sight of the specifics. The United Nations Organisation must remain focal to the debate on this issue and needs to continue to engage with the world media to spread the message and spirit of fraternity in a world where large or small does not count. Equally experience has amply illustrated that small countries, just as large countries, are essential to global security, cultural interchange, and to respect and tolerance for diversity.

As a Mediterranean state, as a member of the European Union, as current Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth of Nations, and generally as a member of the international community of states, Malta is determined to continue to give its contribution, in all these fora and in this forum, towards the interests of peace, justice and the rule of international law in the world today and in the future.

Thank you