

General Debate

65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly
28th September 2010
United Nations, New York

Statement by

The Honorable Dr. Tonio Borg
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

Mr. President,

I would like to join other delegations that preceded me in offering my congratulations and that of my Delegation on your election as President of this Sixty-fifth Session of the United Nations General Assembly. I am convinced that your political experience and diplomatic skill will assist and guide this Assembly in its deliberations especially in addressing important and critical issues on the international agenda.

My congratulations are also extended to your predecessor, Dr. Ali Abdussalam Treki, for the excellent manner he presided over the Sixty-fourth Session of the General Assembly. Through his commitment and leadership role Dr. Treki has successfully guided this Assembly to deal effectively with a number of priority issues facing our Organization.

May I also take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to the U.N. Secretary-General, H.E. Ban Ki-moon, for his dedication and untiring efforts to ensure that our Organization lives up to the Purposes and Principles of the Charter of the United Nations. His comprehensive report on the work of the Organization indicates, in no uncertain terms, the progress which the United Nations has made under his leadership and guidance and to which Malta is extremely grateful.

Mr. President,

During the past twelve months the international community has been overwhelmed by the global and financial crises. These crises have been exacerbated by the many humanitarian tragedies around the world. Natural disasters, terrorists attacks, armed violence and internal conflicts have continued to bring havoc, destruction, loss of life and increased forcible displacement of people worldwide.

In the face of these negative realities, our Organization has continued to be the refuge of the most vulnerable and most deprived of our societies, for addressing the increasing inequalities, in responding cohesively and rapidly to disasters and calamities, and in efforts to improve the very nature of existence and survival of humankind.

It is an accepted norm that “there is no development without security, no security without development and neither without respect for human rights”.

Mr. President,

Important achievements have been registered in the past months in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. The new strategic offensive arms agreement to replace the 1991 START I, signed in Prague in April 2010, between the Presidents of the United States and of the Russian

Federation, created appropriate political momentum which prepared the way for the successful outcome of the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

Malta is particularly pleased that among the agreed actions taken by the Conference was the endorsement by the NPT States Parties of the convening by the U.N. Secretary-General, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States, in consultation with the countries of the region, of a Conference in 2012 to address the establishment of a nuclear weapon free zone and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

Mr. President,

The United Nations General Assembly resolutions recognize that positive developments worldwide, but in particular in Europe, in the Maghreb and in the Middle East can be enhanced by closer Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in all spheres.

Thirty-five years ago the then Conference (now Organization) on Security and Cooperation in Europe, meeting in Helsinki, Finland, adopted on 1 August 1975, the Final Act incorporating an important Chapter exclusively dedicated to the Mediterranean which affirmed, among other things, that security in the Mediterranean is closely linked to European security as well as to international peace and security.

Malta, a European country but nonetheless Mediterranean, has throughout these many years, and even when it became a Member of this Organization, exercised its vocation for a Euro-Mediterranean foreign policy that embraces confidence- and security-building initiatives which further enhance dialogue and understanding in our region. Indeed my country has been present at the creation of all the Mediterranean fora in existence today. Through its Membership of the European Union, Malta has consolidated this vocation in a manner which promotes an ever-increasing linkage of the European-Mediterranean partnership.

Today, Malta is host of the European Commission-League of Arab States Liaison Office which has formalized the relations between the European Commission and the Arab World in a way that it has never done before. Indeed, Malta, the smallest Member of the European Union and one of the smallest countries in the Mediterranean, has translated its vision of an interlocutor with a European identity and with Mediterranean characteristics to act as a political and cultural bridge to our neighbours both to the north and to the south and even beyond.

But our commitment to the Mediterranean dimension does not stop there.

Malta continues to seize every opportunity to contribute further to this dialogue of partners. This has certainly been the case within the Union for the Mediterranean, where Malta has played an active part in ensuring that the requisite momentum is maintained despite occasional political hurdles. In the institutional domain, Malta has nominated a Deputy Secretary General, an honour accorded to six UfM members. The Maltese Deputy Secretary-General has been entrusted with the portfolio covering Social and Civil Affairs, an area undoubtedly of vital interest to all UfM partners.

Next month, Malta will be hosting the Mediterranean Conference of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe which will address, from a Mediterranean perspective, issues currently being debated within the Organisation in the dialogue on the future of European security.

Between 8 and 9 November 2010, Malta will be the venue of the First Regional Conference for the Mediterranean of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. The Regional Conference is envisaged to adopt a Strategy Document and an Action Plan which would express the commitment of the Group of Friends of the Alliance to advance goals in concrete terms in a

region where intercultural dialogue and cooperation has great potential to succeed in overcoming the big challenges the region faces.

In the first half of 2011 Malta intends to host the Second Summit of the Western Mediterranean Forum known as the 5+5 having been a Member of this Forum since 1991. The convening of this Summit, the second of its sort in seven years, should among others serve to reaffirm the relevance of the 5+5 dialogue in the present-day context. Malta continues to attach great value to this informal mechanism, as a platform for open and frank discussion between North and South.

It is also of satisfaction to record the successful first Joint International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace held in Malta last February organized by the U.N. Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean.

Here I would like to recognize the important resolution adopted by the Sixty-fourth Session of the General Assembly last December (2009) where the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean whose seat is in Malta, was granted Observer Status and invited to participate in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly.

Mr. President,

This brings me to an issue which is closely related to the Mediterranean region. I am referring to the situation in the Middle East with the Palestinian question at its core. Malta joins other Member States in welcoming the decision reached last month between Israelis and the Palestinians to resume direct negotiations to resolve all permanent status issues.

The launching of direct negotiations on 2 September 2010 in Washington D.C. followed by the Sharm al Sheikh meeting to be hopefully followed by another in Jerusalem next month, has renewed the sense of urgency and expectations in the resolution of an issue that has been on the international agenda for these last sixty-two years. The intense and unstinting efforts during these last few months by the Quartet, the United Nations Secretary-General and the Arab League, as well as the Israelis and Palestinians themselves besides the valuable contribution of the United States Administration, have opened new possibilities for the emergence of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

As a Member of the international community, Malta will continue to play its part within the United Nations, the European Union and in other international, regional and sub-regional fora to support the creation of the right conditions where all peoples of the Mediterranean and the Middle East will live in peace and prosperity.

Mr. President,

This year has brought us stark reminders of the devastation and loss of life that we can expect from climate change if it continues unabated: floods and landslides in Asia droughts in Europe and Africa, and wildfires in Russia.

Yet, despite such warnings, the international community has yet to adopt a sufficiently ambitious response strategy that would bind us all to contribute fairly to mitigating climate change, keeping it within manageable limits. Important steps have indeed been taken over the last two decades [in Rio, Kyoto and Marrakech]. But the great expectations of a decisive push forward in Copenhagen last year were disappointing.

Nevertheless, we must persevere on the road ahead - perhaps more pragmatically than dramatically. Copenhagen did produce several seeds of agreement that can be harvested in Cancun in December, where operational decisions - backed by the promised "fast-start finance" -

could advance action on several fronts of wide interest to Member States. I wish my Mexican counterpart, Foreign Minister Patricia Espinosa Castellano, all success in defining and facilitating a positive outcome in Cancun and in laying the political foundations for further advances next year in South Africa.

Vulnerable States like mine have no option but to integrate the expected climatic impacts in our vision of the future. Adaptation to these impacts is, in fact, a requirement for all of us, large and small. Yet the topic often lingers on the sidelines of policy-making. We must give adaptation the political and economic attention it deserves and ensure well-targeted financial support to vulnerable countries or communities most in need of it. I also would like to underline the potential of cooperative action on adaptation at regional levels. In this respect, Malta intends to be proactive in promoting such cooperation in the Mediterranean region including in the context of the Mediterranean Climate Change Initiative announced by the Prime Minister of Greece.

Mr. President,

The protection of the human being continues to constitute a top priority for my country.

In this regard, we have witnessed during the past year important developments within the United Nations which will significantly contribute in delivering results for a more just world as well as putting in practice the system-wide coherence. We note the progress, albeit small but most welcome, on the discussion on the Responsibility to Protect. It will be recalled that five years ago the World Summit Outcome called for an expansion of the U.N. capabilities for early warning and assessment of possible genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, besides supporting the establishment of an early warning capability. Malta therefore highly commends the interactive dialogue which took place last July and commends the initiative of the Secretary-General to set up a U.N. Joint Office to deal with the prevention of genocide and the wider range of crimes and violations covered by the responsibility to protect.

Another important development has been the adoption of the UN Global Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons. Malta welcomes with satisfaction this development and intends to work with all stakeholders to effectively implement the provisions and activities of the Plan of Action.

Another aspect of human trafficking is the smuggling of human beings. The phenomenon of illegal immigration stoked by the greed and callous operations of organised criminal groups in the Mediterranean is putting at risk the lives of hundreds of immigrants on the threshold of Europe. Malta has become for some years now a country of destination attracting a disproportionate influx of illegal immigrants and asylum seekers. Malta's need for assistance in providing beneficiaries of international protection with a durable solution has been recognised by many. While Malta affirms its commitment to abide by its international obligations, at the same time we reiterate our calls to the international community to continue to assist us in the resettlement process of these unfortunate people.

Mr. President,

While not a new phenomenon, yet piracy and armed robbery at sea against vessels continues to be an issue of grave concern to international navigation and the safety of commercial maritime routes. Malta, as one of the leading Flag States in the world, is very much concerned about the increase in the frequency and ferocity of piracy attacks on merchant ships off the coast of Somalia. Malta's participation in Operation *Atalanta* is not only a contribution to the efforts for safe international maritime traffic but is also in line with Malta's commitments as a State Party to UNCLOS and to other relevant maritime Treaties to which Malta is also a State Party. It is in this direction that we intend to promote a debate in the international community on new issues in the law of the sea sphere which have cropped up since UNCLOS in 1982.

Mr. President,

We intend to launch a fresh and constructive debate amongst like-minded Member states on the question of Human Responsibilities. Even though we are here treading on ground which may prove to be difficult, we believe that while the fundamental rights and freedoms form the corner stone of a free and democratic society, so do human responsibilities. Rights and duties are two sides of the same coin. Our commitment towards duties should be as firm as that towards rights. Stressing the rights of society and our duties towards others, - which in no case should dwarf our attention on the rights of the individual- puts emphasis on that which keeps society together. Malta shall be taking up this matter to achieve a measure of progress in this field in the international community.

Mr. President,

Before concluding, allow me to pay a tribute in memory to President Guido de Marco, one of my predecessors who as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and as President of Malta bestowed honour to his country and the people of Malta which he loved dearly. His passing away last month left a great void not only among the Maltese population but also to the many that worked with him for the betterment of those in the international community that are oppressed, weak and vulnerable.

Twenty years ago this august Assembly elected him to serve as President of the Forty-fifth Session. His strong belief in and steadfast support of the United Nations Organization can be encapsulated in his own words at the opening Plenary of the Session on 18 September 1990 when, in referring to the enormous challenges which lay ahead, he stated that "equally enormous is the political will to guarantee that mankind's destiny is safeguarded not only by individual countries, but by a strong United Nations."

His election to preside this Assembly ushered in, among other things, new initiatives for the revitalization of our U.N. General Assembly, a legacy that has continued and still continues today.

By following Guido de Marco's vision for and love of the United Nations, my country shall continue supporting this Organisation and its Secretary General to make our world a better place for present and future generations.

Thank you.