

MALTA



STATEMENT BY

**THE HON. DR. LAWRENCE GONZI
PRIME MINISTER**

GENERAL DEBATE

**SIXTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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**PERMANENT MISSION OF MALTA TO THE UNITED NATIONS
249 EAST 35TH STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016 TEL. (212) 725-2345 FAX. (212) 779-7097
e-mail: malta-un.newyork@gov.mt**

SPEECH BY THE HON LAWRENCE GONZI, PRIME MINISTER, AT THE SIXTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, NEW YORK, USA. – FRIDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2008

Mr. President
Mr. Secretary-General
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to join other delegations in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your unanimous election as President of the Sixty-third Session of the United Nations General Assembly. I am sure that with your experience and diplomatic skills you will chart a successful outcome of this Assembly.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the Sixty-second Session, for the leadership and the dedication he exerted in guiding us diligently throughout his tenure.

Mr. President,

Human security and the dignity of every man and woman require us to continue the discussion in order to build consensus on the principle of the responsibility to protect, particularly in relation to genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, as agreed by the 2005 World Summit. While we realise the sensitivity of the issue, Malta agrees with the Secretary-General that we need to move from declarations of commitment to practice and implementation.

Likewise, the fight against terrorism must remain high on our agenda. We should not lower our guard. We must always be vigilant and ready to take collective and practical action on a daunting, complex and politically sensitive challenge. Terrorism has no boundaries and the unspeakable acts of terrorism can strike anywhere, anytime, in poor and rich countries, with innocent victims paying for these vicious terror attacks, as the one perpetrated in Pakistan last week, which undermine the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the individual and of society itself.

Malta, as a State Party to the International Criminal Court, believes that the work carried out so far by the Court is commendable and merits our continued cooperation and commitment towards the maintenance of international peace and security.

Malta feels that the continuing recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and other grave offences against children merits our full condemnation. In this regard, we welcome the sustained activity of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict as well as the sterling work being carried out by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy.

Mr. President,

The protection of the human being brings with it the responsibility to protect the environment. One of the issues which has been described as 'the defining challenge of our times' and 'the flagship issue' of the debate in the 62nd General Assembly, is climate change. Next December, we will be commemorating the 20th Anniversary from when this Assembly, on the proposal of Malta, adopted its resolution 43/53 entitled 'Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind' and which as a result the General Assembly recognised that 'Climate Change is a Common Concern of Mankind'. Malta is proud that the seminal proposal launched in 1988 found universal support which eventually led to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol.

The holding, earlier this year, by the General Assembly of a High-level Panel on 'Addressing Climate Change: the United Nations and the World at Work', continues to give credibility and authority to the will of the overwhelming majority of States to respond urgently to climate change. The process initiated at the Bali Conference last year established a clear road map with a view to agreeing on a new multilateral, comprehensive, coherent, and effective post-2012 agreement by 2009, in order to avoid any implementation gap.

Malta reiterates its conviction that we have a common obligation and responsibility to support ambitious and urgent action, at the national, regional and international level, within the United Nations Framework Convention so as to stop and overturn in these coming years the accumulation of greenhouse gases which are causing detrimental climate change. The vulnerability of small islands States to the negative impacts of climate change needs to be underlined.

Mr. President,

For obvious reasons, Malta continues to direct its efforts towards making the Mediterranean a region of peace and cooperation.

Malta welcomes and recognises the important developments on the Cyprus question, the renewed vigour in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the indirect negotiations between Israel and Syria with Turkish mediation, the formation of a national unity Government in Lebanon, and the improved relations between Lebanon and Syria.

Since we met here last year important developments have taken place on the permanent settlement negotiations of the Palestinian question. The Annapolis Conference held in November 2007 renewed an otherwise bleak future in the resolution of this question. Malta feels that all United Nations Member States, without exception, should continue to support the Secretary-General in his quest, together with the Quartet, to resolve the issue

of Palestine refugees and that of the permanent status of Jerusalem, as well as the other important issues of settlements, borders, and water and security.

The Paris Donors' Conference for the Palestinian State, the formal start of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and the series of meetings between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, have given a most welcome meaning to the efforts being undertaken to resolve all outstanding issues, including all core issues without exception. Malta's hosting of a United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine in June of this year followed shortly afterwards by the visit to Malta of President Mahmoud Abbas in July, came at an important and crucial phase in the on-going efforts being made to implement the Road Map commitments and obligations for a permanent two-State solution. Malta will continue to lend its support to all initiatives that would bring everlasting peace to both the Israeli and Palestinian people.

We welcome all initiatives which create a bond between European and Mediterranean countries. A case in point is the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, with its Headquarters in Malta, aiming to bring together all the littoral States of the Mediterranean on an equal footing, to examine questions and take decisions on issues of direct interest to the countries of the region.

An important development in the Euro-Med partnership was the launching last July, on the initiative of President Sarkozy of France, of the Union for the Mediterranean within the Barcelona Process. Malta believes that this initiative will be a significant milestone in our common efforts to promote security and prosperity in the Euro-Mediterranean region to the equal benefit of all European Union Member States and Mediterranean partners. Malta is looking forward to working constructively with other Members of the Union to address some of the problems which the Mediterranean confronts, including in particular development, food security, water and energy.

In referring to these problems, I must highlight also the unprecedented increase in the influx of irregular immigrants that have been arriving in Malta mainly from the African continent. Malta is well aware of its responsibilities in this area. However, as has been highlighted on numerous occasions, it is extremely difficult for us to continue to carry such a burden which is so acutely disproportionate to the size of the country and its population. It is for this reason that Malta has continuously requested assistance in tackling this problem through the principles of solidarity and sharing of responsibilities from Europe and other countries as well as from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Malta is grateful to those countries which have come forward to assist us in coping with this phenomenon. Nevertheless, much more needs to be done by us all, including the countries of origin and the countries of transit.

Mr. President,

Africa continues to present us with a formidable challenge. It is a challenge not only for African countries themselves but for the whole of the international community. Whilst noting with satisfaction the success stories in the reduction of poverty, Malta remains

very concerned that progress in Africa is still lagging behind. We have an obligation to enhance efforts to assist African countries to meet their legitimate goals of sustainable development.

Mr. President,

It has been acknowledged that the Millennium Development Goals and the protection of human rights share a number of characteristics which require our constant attention. Recent phenomena such as climate change, rising food prices and international financial instability, add further obstacles to the attainment of these Goals. Poverty eradication and the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals are to be priorities of our times which should be addressed in a multidimensional way, both through the conduct of political and economic decision-making as well as through social and environmental factors related to different facets such as culture and gender equality, geography, climate and energy.

Malta strongly believes that the pledges made at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000 on the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals remain the overarching objective of our global agenda. Besides being a Signatory to the 'Call for Action' launched by Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Malta is also actively working to reach its targets for official development assistance set by the European Union.

Mr. President,

The United Nations is passing through exciting but difficult times. Under the able leadership of the Secretary-General, the search for a reinvigorated Organisation that would provide the whole membership with a sound basis to look to the future with vigour and determination has been endorsed and accepted by Member States.

During the 62nd Session of this Assembly, Member States continued to consider a series of critical issues in the process of reforming our Organisation including, advancing a System-Wide Coherence, reviewing all mandates originating from resolutions of the General Assembly, management practices, the revitalisation of the General Assembly, and giving the Security Council a more equitable representation.

We all recognise that the transformation of the United Nations into a stronger Organisation requires from all of us determination and conviction that only a concerted effort by all Member States can achieve. The reform of the United Nations is an evolving exercise which requires on our part that understanding, that solidarity, that partnership which we as Member States must engage to overcome the new and emerging challenges facing humankind.

Mr. President,

In a few weeks, the United Nations Member States will be celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Sixty years

have passed since that historic day in 1948; six decades which have witnessed great political, economic and social upheavals in the lives of our peoples. Throughout these years, this Family of Nations has also increased four-fold bringing with it a diverse community, large and small countries, rich and poor, but with the sole aim of upholding the fundamental premise of the Universal Declaration that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”.

This anniversary on the 10th December 2008 will provide us with the opportunity to rededicate the pledges and commitments we made when we became Members of this Organisation. It is a re-commitment, which as Prime Minister of Malta, and on behalf of the Maltese people, I solemnly make today.

Thank you, Mr. President.