



ITALY

STATEMENT BY
THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF ITALY

THE HONORABLE
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TO THE 66TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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Mr. President,

Italy has a long tradition of **mediation** that has shaped our history and our approach to international affairs. In the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of Italian unification this year, we commemorated the vision of the founding fathers of our nation and the sacrifices of so many patriots. We also recalled the role of **mediation** in bridging the gap between the aspirations for independence and the reality of foreign occupation. One century later, our vocation for **mediation** was fulfilled when we were among the first countries to launch the process of European pacification. We helped restore peace and prosperity to a war-torn continent by engaging governments in dialogue rather than disputes.

Our attitude to mediation is inspired by both our history and our **geography**. Our territory is located right at the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, making us keenly aware that our security is not independent of that of the region surrounding us.

For decades Italy has emphasized the need to bridge **the economic and social gap** between the conditions of the northern shores of the Mediterranean and the expectations of our neighbours to the South. Despite this vision, we tended to overlook the aspirations for civil and political rights of the peoples of North Africa and the Middle East. Peoples so close to us geographically but **far apart** in terms of the rights enjoyed by our citizens. On the face of it, the approach favoured by the European and the other Western Countries – including the United States – was to forge partnerships with undemocratic regimes and place a priority on security, counter-terrorism cooperation, and migration policy.

The Arab spring was a wake-up call, reminding us that no political leader can maintain power at the expense of his or her own people. It confirmed the principle that there can be no mediation or compromise where **fundamental rights** are concerned. And it showed that cooperation for the sake of security and stability is no alternative to promoting freedom, economic and democratic growth, and job creation.

Our response to the uprisings was consistent with our values. We called for dialogue and **deplored the use of force against civilians**. This was not enough in **Libya**, however, where the regime had vowed to slaughter its own civilians. The only way to prevent a massacre was for the international community to invoke the principle of **responsibility to protect**. By helping to implement this decision in military, diplomatic, and humanitarian

terms, we shifted *from a culture of sovereign impunity* to one of *responsible sovereignty*, rooted in national and international accountability for the most serious violations of human rights. At the same time we supported international sanctions against the **Syrian** leadership.

Mr. President,

The uprisings in North Africa and in the Middle East send a message that the UN can do more and do better. Let me be clear. **We do not want less United Nations involvement: we want more. Libya** can be the first test case for a more prominent **UN role**. The UN is called upon to coordinate and lead the international community's assistance to the country. The international community should maintain cohesion and unity of purpose, avoid a fragmented response, and resist engaging in a "first-past-the-post" logic. There should be no competition because **there is only one winner**: the Libyan people. **The UN should therefore chair the international coordination mechanisms** with the support of the relevant regional organizations such as the Arab League, the African Union, and the European Union.

At this juncture we need to prevent resentment and extremism from gaining ground. We are ready to build **respectful new partnerships** without imposing pre-packaged models. This is why we have promoted the idea of a **new Mediterranean Plan** for growth and development. And we have proposed a permanent **Conference on Security and Cooperation** with the goal of building an inclusive dialogue among equals on political, economic and cultural issues. If we fail to respond and **the Arab spring does not produce results soon**, we will all have a heavy price to pay.

Mr. President,

Never has mediation been more necessary in the tense stand-off between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Confrontation has led nowhere. The time has come to defuse this long-standing and disruptive conflict through recourse to dialogue and the building of mutual trust. We continue to strongly back the **American efforts**, and we welcome the **Quartet's** new effort to gather the necessary support to restart the negotiations between the parties toward the creation, soon, of a strong and safe Palestinian State. Within the **European Union**, which has to speak with one voice, Italy is also ready to exercise more leadership and political vision in re-launching the peace process.

In **Lebanon**, Italy is playing a prominent role in mediation. The Italian contingent in UNIFIL was awarded the **peace medal of the United Nations** for its contribution to maintaining peace and stability in the country. This prize honours the achievements of our soldiers in Lebanon but also the commitment of the Italian government to peacekeeping. Italy is the sixth top contributor to the UN PKO budget and, since 2006, the top EU and WEOG contributor of troops to the UN.

In **Africa**, far too many people are still grappling with the serious problems caused by regional conflicts. These conflicts undermine stability and prosperity for millions of people, spreading the poisonous seed of terrorism and piracy. As a witness to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between **North and South Sudan**, Italy has welcomed the implementation of the CPA, which has led to the birth of the new State of South Sudan. This achievement should be an incentive to settle the post-CPA arrangements without further delay.

In the **Horn of Africa**, Italy has a traditional commitment to contributing to peace, security and development. In the past few months, we have financed projects in many sectors: health, education, nutrition, training, governance support, peace and security. But our assistance is not enough. In **Somalia** people are facing starvation and humanitarian disaster. International support must be stepped up to deliver basic services to the population and foster political reconciliation.

Mr. President,

The UN collective security system is adapting its structure and practices to the new challenges by making good and flexible use of its fundamental and cost-effective tools. Mediation is one of them. We are among the sponsors of the **Resolution on strengthening the role of mediation** in the peaceful settlement of disputes.

We also encourage the Organization to play a more significant role in conflict prevention, the settlement of disputes, and peace-building efforts. To this end, we rely on the impartiality and authority of the Secretary-General. We commend him for his leadership

in crisis management and encourage him in this noble endeavor and in his commitment to budgetary discipline.

We also commend all the efforts to promote a strong solution to the reform of the UN Security Council. A reform inspired by the UN core principles of democracy, accountability, consensus and flexibility; a reform that will gather the widest majority and with which each and every Member State can identify.

Mr. President,

Our **humanistic heritage** defines the human being as the measure of all things. The principle of placing people first underpins our active support for United Nations campaigns on **fundamental issues** such as the abolition of the death penalty, the protection of freedom of religion or belief, and the ending of the practice of female genital mutilation.

The people-first approach also entails **mediation** between the pressing need for modernisation and the goal of improving individual quality of life. We need to enhance **food security** by tackling the crucial links between speculation, inflation of food prices, and instability. We can count on the new bodies created in the framework of FAO and the Rome-based UN Agencies to reduce food price volatility and its negative impact on the most vulnerable people.

We also pay close attention to urban development and environmental sustainability, promoting important international events such as the **World Urban Forum**, which will be held next year in Italy, and a world conference on the topic of the inter-ethnic city.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, Italy wants to place the rights of human beings and **the environment in which we live at the center of society. True to this principle**, Italy wants to help **create and consolidate a modern humanism**. There could be no better defence against the hatred and criminal intolerance that struck this city, this country, and this world ten years ago.