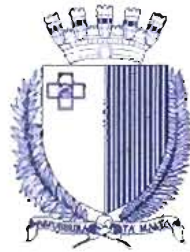


# MALTA



STATEMENT BY

**THE HON. DR. TONIO BORG  
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER  
AND  
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**GENERAL DEBATE**

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

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Mr. President,

I extend my warmest congratulations on your election to preside over the Sixty-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly. The demanding agenda of this Assembly makes this no easy task, but I assure you of Malta's support and friendship.

Mr. President,  
Secretary General,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over a year ago, the protagonists of the Arab Spring proclaimed that their time had come. They shed their blood for freedom, calling for an end to the *status quo* of oppression and injustice.

Unfortunately, extremists persist in their efforts to derail this call. US Ambassador Christopher Stevens is, sadly, one of their victims. One cannot but stress enough the importance to protect the inviolability of diplomatic premises and personnel as well as reiterate our collective condemnation of the deplorable acts perpetrated recently in various capitals in our neighbourhood.

Mr. President

Many doubted the success of the Arab Spring, many feared its call for change.

Yet 'change' did come. We are now witnessing the first seeds of democracy blossoming in places previously unthinkable.

And more 'change' is yet to come. People around the world are calling for it.

It is a call that pits us against conventional thinking, pushing us out of our comfort zone and into the unfamiliar; a call for humanity to go beyond the borders of human difference and indifference.

And we have the choice to heed that call or to ignore it. But make no mistake, we *do* have a choice.

Mr. President,

Malta knows all too well what the call for change is about. It experiences it first hand as it receives those fleeing war, hunger and persecution, arriving on its shores after a perilous journey in search of a better life.

Malta recognizes that we need to give these people safe refuge and we do so with a sense of solidarity and a strong belief that every human life is worth saving. We are committed to giving assistance and we remain steadfast in our belief, that Malta will continue its historical role of welcoming those who are bereft of their human rights and dignity.

And it is in this spirit, that Malta calls upon the international community to give these people genuine alternatives; to no longer accept that it is a problem in someone else's backyard. We want to ensure that the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals do not become a simple check-marking exercise, but instead underscore a truly global effort that will lift millions out of deprivation, disease and discrimination. These goals must be sustained long after the media has gone and the speeches are over, and we urge this Assembly to spare no effort to see this done.

Mr. President,

The choice for freedom has seen Malta's neighbour to the south hold its first free and fully democratic elections in sixty years. We salute Libya on its recent successes. For many the act of voting was a success in itself. The Libyan people voted for their policy-makers. They did not vote for ideology, but for visionaries that will breathe life into their people's aspirations. It is a time of celebration for our neighbours and Malta joins others in recognizing their achievements, as well as the achievements of the other countries of the 'Arab Spring'.

Yet as we bear witness to the wave of democratic reform drifting across the southern Mediterranean shores, we must also recall that others are still struggling for freedom. The situation in Syria cannot but trouble us.

Oppression and violence are never the solution. They only stifle the inevitable for a short while, for the human spirit can never be defeated.

And it is our duty as the international community to respond. It is not a question of resolutions and syntax. It is our moral obligation to ensure that the people of Syria are not abandoned to a tragic fate.

Mr. President,

The time to sit on the fence and live with prejudices and division is over.

Malta firmly believes that this can be the right time for a new era - not just for the southern littoral shores of the Mediterranean Sea, but for the whole basin. The Mediterranean region has known too many wars, too many divisions and far too many prejudices. As the heart of the Mediterranean, Malta understands well the nuances of the basin. And it is this understanding that pushes us to reaffirm our commitment to the promotion of prosperity and peace across the whole Mediterranean region and beyond. Malta's initiative to convene an EU-League of Arab States Ministerial Meeting in Malta in 2008 specifically aimed at attaining this. We salute the decision for a 'Malta II' to take place in Cairo next November.

Our efforts did not stop here. In a few days' time, Malta will host the 5+5 Heads of State & Government Meeting of the Western Mediterranean Forum. This grouping should offer an excellent opportunity to discuss these issues. The Summit coincides with the dramatic changes taking place in the political landscape in North Africa. Expectations for the implementation of concrete action in Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, transcending ineffective declarations, statements and conclusions, remain high. I hope that the Malta Summit will meet the aspirations of the peoples of the Northern and Southern basin of the Mediterranean. We cannot fail in this regard. We owe it to our peoples.

But if we want to truly embrace the changes that are taking place around us, we have to take them further.

Mr. President,

The call to rise above stalemate and stagnation is nowhere more evident than in the Middle East Peace Process, where the fear of change keeps holding all back. The parties concerned have to face some uncomfortable truths in order to overcome the stumbling blocks.

Bickering over who-does-what or -when is not the way forward.

Forging common ground does not equate with giving in.

Malta believes that the international community's efforts in this Process have to be redoubled and that there can be no rest until the world welcomes a truly stable and secure Middle East. We owe it to the Palestinians and Israelis. We owe it to the wider Mediterranean region, which has been deadlocked now for far too long in the grips of this struggle.

And Mr. President, there really is no alternative to this, for the alternative is further entrenchment of positions held, further extremism and instability.

Malta reaffirms its commitment to the efforts of the United Nations and of the European Union in particular, towards the attainment of the goal of two viable states living in harmony next to each other. But this solution is only possible if it is feasible on the ground, that is to say, no unilateral action is taken, making it an unattainable reality.

A year from now we should no longer be talking of a Middle East Peace Process but of a Middle East in peace period.

The sceptics among us will note that this is what was said last year, and yes, of course, even the year before that. For over sixty years, we have been making this call. But we must not let opportunity slip away once again. The Arab Spring shows us that we need to answer the call of history now. This time it *can* be different.

Mr. President,

The events happening around us highlight not only on our sense of duty to promote and protect human rights worldwide, but also on our sense of responsibility; for the actions we take – or fail to take – today, will have a bearing on future generations.

Malta drew the attention to this with its call for a Universal Declaration on Human Responsibilities made in this very hall during the Sixty-fourth Session of this Assembly in 2009. We know we are not alone in this endeavour. We share with other Member States a commitment to solidarity, to cohesion of ideas and to a harmony of discourse in favour of the sustainability of the planet and the stewardship of its peoples. And it is this conviction that encourages us to push our efforts further for we are certain that history will be on our side.

Mr. President,

Our destiny is what we perceive our future to be.

We are convinced that the United Nations stands for the betterment of humanity. We remain committed to live up to the expectations and aspirations we adhere to under its Charter.

And most of all, we need to embrace change; the future begins with the choices we make today.

Thank you.