

STATEMENT TO THE 70TH
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF ITALY
THE HONORABLE MATTEO RENZI
29 SEPTEMBER 2015

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring into this hall with gratitude and pride the voice of the Italian people, a generous and responsible people. The voice of a people who every day are committed to saving the lives of hundreds of their sisters and brothers in the heart of the Mediterranean. This is a hall that demands profound reflection, not slogans.

In every part of the world, political life is more and more fixated on the present. It is more and more tied to discussions shaped by the 24/7 news stations, internet and social media. Let me be clear: I belong to the generation for whom the web and social media are an extraordinary horizon of freedom, an extraordinary tool that allows us to change lives and prospects.

But there is a risk of reducing the horizon of the discussion to the next opinion poll, to the next tweet. I think we should reject the dictatorship of the instantaneous, and try to honor this hall trying for a moment to engage in a longer, broader reflection.

I am thinking of my Country, which on the map appears to be shaped like a bridge. A bridge between North and South, between Europe and Africa, a bridge between East and West, extending from the Middle East to the Balkans.

For its geography and especially for its culture, Italy has always been an extraordinary laboratory, traversed by influences of every kind. And this is the reason why we were the first in Europe to grasp the momentous dimension of what is happening in the Mediterranean.

From the first day we have been saying – even in this hall last year – that the question of refugees is not a question of numbers. The problem of migration is not a problem of organization or of numbers: the problem is fear. The fear that runs through our societies and that we must take seriously if we wish to defeat it.

In Greek mythology, Phobos was the god of fear, able to paralyze the best armies and cause the easiest battles to be lost. This is why the

glorious ancient city of Sparta built a great temple to Phobos and did its utmost to gain his favor.

Europe was born to defeat fear, to replace it with the ideal of courage, peace, cooperation, and civilization. And for a long time this is what Europe was. In the past seventy years, our continent has left behind centuries of war and civil war. Europe was a miracle.

For someone like me, who as a young man witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall and found in that event one of the reasons to commit to political life, to see new walls going up today is intolerable. Europe was born to tear down walls, not to build them.

This is why Italy is in the front line in rescuing thousands of migrants who are fleeing from war and despair. This is why I had the privilege to accompany Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on one of our ships that are participating in the rescue operations.

Addressing migratory flows requires the capacity of a comprehensive, global strategy. Italy in particular engaged in a partnership with the African Countries through a broad array of initiatives, in particular with the African Union, as I had the opportunity to say in Addis Ababa at a recent United Nations summit.

But we must ask ourselves, Mr. President, dear colleagues, whether today, 70 years since the San Francisco Charter, does the United Nations realize how crucial its role is? Does it have the wisdom to recognize its mistakes and the strength to correct them, writing a new page and assuring a better future for your children, for my children?

I think it will take an effort on the part of everyone. And Italy will not shirk its responsibilities. This is why we decided to present our candidature to the Security Council for a non-permanent seat for 2017-2018, with the motto, “Building the peace of tomorrow.” We do so in the belief that it is the job of everyone here today to make an effort to build an alternative the culture of violence and nihilism, because the new crises strike the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Europe, the borders of Europe.

I am thinking, for example, of the consolidation of the cease-fire in Ukraine.

I am thinking of the great joy with which we received the news of the agreement between the United States and Cuba, which is of extraordinary historic proportions.

I am thinking of the hopes that each of us has in the agreement with Iran on the nuclear program to open up a phase of hope throughout the region. While we feel committed to the implementation to the agreement, we reiterate forcefully the right to existence of the people and the State of Israel.

It is only through dialogue and negotiation that we can find a future for the younger generations. There is no alternative to dialogue, also on the delicate Israel-Palestinian question. It is essential to return to the negotiating table, with the goal of reaching a solution of two States living side-by-side in peace and security.

This general debate has been characterized by many discussions on Syria. We have all acknowledged and touched with our hands the failure of years of inertia. We think the only way out is to give the word back to politics through a process that can finally lead to a genuine transition.

But all of this holds together if we have the courage to stare reality in the face. And to see that now as never before a perilous enemy is at our gates: Daesh, the enemy of extremism and terrorism.

Through the Carabinieri Corps, fundamental in Italy and the world, we are proud to be the leader of the Coalition for training the Iraqi police force. We know that the work of the security forces is decisive to guaranteeing everyday security, the possibility for a family to return home, for a woman, a mother, to give serenity to her children.

We will continue our leadership role together with the United States and Saudi Arabia of the Working Group to counter financing for Daesh.

And at the same time we must underline that the action Daesh is not limited to that region – which is nevertheless an extraordinary mosaic of pluralism and beauty – but risks establishing itself forcefully in Africa, starting from Libya.

From this podium, I renew my appeal to all the parties who in Libya aspire for a peaceful and unified nation

Our Libyan brothers and sisters must know that they are not alone, that the United Nations General Assembly has not forgotten them. Italy is ready to collaborate with a National Unity Government and to restore cooperation in key areas: to give Libya back a future. If the new Libyan Government asks us, Italy is ready to take on the leadership role in a

mechanism to assist the stabilization of the Country, authorized by the international community.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. President,

There are many reasons for our role in the fight against terrorism. It is above all a battle for values, a battle for culture. The terrorists want us to die. Failing that, they want us to live as they would have it. This is why the battle we are waging is a battle against darkness and fear because fear is the playground of terrorism. The first area where this emerges is culture.

When terrorists attack Palmira or the Bardo Museum, or a school or a university, from Asia to Africa, they are not attacking the past: they are targeting our future.

Italy is the Country where the culture of conservation of cultural assets was born. Proud of our roots, of our Renaissance, we have the highest concentration in the world of UNESCO cultural heritage sites. This is why together with Country partners and friends, we candidate ourselves to be the guardians of culture in the world, carrying out concrete actions both here in New York and at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, through United4Heritage, the Blue Helmets of culture. On the basis of a model

developed in our Country, we are proposing the establishment of an international task force, with both military and civilian members, for operations to protect and rebuild art historical sites. Because this is who we are, this is our identity.

This task force will be available to UNESCO, and it could be deployed in the framework of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Let us not forget that even our Europe runs the risk, in the absence of a great educational project, to see growing at its own home the evil seed of terrorism. Let us not forget that what has happened in recent months and weeks, from Charlie Hebdo in Paris to Belgium and Denmark, involved the presence of women and men born in European Countries, raised in European Countries, educated in European Countries, and transformed into terrorists against human rights, against the very *raison d'être* of our continent.

So I think it is important that we all win this educational challenge together, and at the same time that our model of peace-keeping, recalled by President Obama with our gratitude, is an established model that can be in different Countries, . . . as is happening in this moment affirmed in Afghanistan.

I wish to recall Italy's commitment alongside Afghanistan, and to honor the women and men who have sacrificed their lives for our collective security, particularly in that Country. We are proud of the work that our soldiers and civilians in support of the Afghan government on the road to peace and prosperity.

Mr. President,

The Security Council is at the center of this challenge. This is not a bureaucratic fact. It is a political fact. The Uniting for Consensus group is ready to continue to work with all Members.

The human rights that are under attack today are for us a reference point at every level.

I am thinking of the Security Council resolution "Women, Peace and Security. "

I am thinking of resolution adopted by the General Assembly last December for a moratorium on the death penalty – a commitment on which we will never tire to work, recalling the words that the Holy Father, Pope Francis, pronounced here and at the U.S. Congress.

Resolutions against forced and early marriage, against female genital mutilations,

These are clear signs of the shared commitment of our community.

The deep tie between peace and security, human rights and development, Mr. President, is the message sent by the Universal Exposition that is taking place as we speak in Milan. The motto of Expo 2015 – “Feeding the Planet: Energy for Live” – a message that intersects many of the expectations of this General Assembly: The promotion of sustainable agriculture – and here I wish to make a commitment, especially to the African Countries, we will never cease to work in this direction, strong with Italian know-how and the desire to work together. Guaranteeing access to food for all; fighting world hunger; changing consumption patterns; the condition of women as central stakeholders in agriculture; the defense of the rights of smallholder farms; but also the easing of tensions and conflicts caused by the degradation of arable land and the scarcity of water for irrigation. These are not secondary issues.

The legacy of Expo Milan is assured by the Milan Charter, and by the commitments of each of us to fighting climate change. Italy stands alongside Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the international

community, mobilizing the necessary resources to assure that the conferences in Lima and Paris are successful.

Mr. President,

With the adoption of Agenda 2030, Italy accepts the challenge of the 5 Ps – People, Prosperity, Partnership, Planet and Peace – the 5Ps that we recognize and that inspire our action for the future.

But allow me to say that Italy intends to contribute forcefully particularly in those battles in which some Countries seem to be alone. In the next few weeks we will welcome to Milan our partners, the Small Island Developing States – considered small States, but great States for their value – for the event on climate change adaptation that will take place in mid-October at Expo Milan, and we will bring a large delegation to Venice, where we will show them, in one of the most beautiful artistic cities in the world, how we are working against the risks associated with the presence of high waters and scarce attention of the international community.

In conclusion, Mr. President, as a candidate for a non-permanent seat, Italy wants these values to be central in the Security Council. But I do not want us to think of these values in an abstract way. I do not want us

to forget that what brings us here is not a document. It is a face. It is many faces.

At the Italian schools, our children learn about the strong ties among the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean, Africa, the Middle East. Today, those children are not “extras” in a movie. They are the reason for our commitment. And of all the values that we teach our children at school we cannot forget that the first value is life.

Many of us were deeply moved this summer, facing the migration crisis, by the photo of little boy. His name was Aylan. A child of Kobani, who together with his older brother fell asleep without ever being able to wake up and see the future. He was photographed, dead, on the beach of Bodrum. We must not limit our commitment to the emotion of the moment. I want us to bear that image in mind and commit to do our best – many children died in the heart of the Mediterranean. They died on the ships of the traffickers, the new slave-traders of today, launched in the direction of Europe. But together with all of those children who are no longer with us, I want to remember the names of children that no one mentions.

Yambambi, Salvatore, Hamed Idris Ibrahim, Francesca Marina. These are some of the children who were born on ships in Mediterranean of the

Italian Marines and Coast Guards, who saved thousands of women, and gave many mothers to give birth on the ships. Thanks to the extraordinary dedication of my fellow citizens, of whom I am so proud. I would like these names, together with the names of those who did not make it, to be remembered as an admonishment to all of us that dignity be restored to politics, that this Assembly realize the enormity of the challenge, but also that Europe – the old Europe born in the name of courage – not give in to fear. Italy will proudly do its part.

Thank you.

