



Statement of the President of the Republic of Cyprus
Wednesday, 25 September 2024

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Mr. President,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to congratulate His Excellency Ambassador Philemon Yang for his election as President of the 79th Session of the General Assembly. Rest assured, Mr. President, of Cyprus' steadfast support for your mission.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I humbly stood at this podium for the first time last year. My main premise then was that the UN Charter is not a reality. It is a promise. A sacred pledge that we inherited from our predecessors.

From those who had the remarkable courage, the clarity of vision, to put pen on paper, vision to action, and to solemnly declare –

Never Again.

These great visionaries, who had the audacity to build peace upon still burning ashes of war, assumed the tremendous responsibility to look beyond the horrors of the past. To learn from history, no matter how painful, and to lay the foundations for a world anchored on peace and stability, respect for international law, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.

A world that leaves no one behind. That ensures prosperity and human dignity for all.

Burning like a torch, lit from those ashes, this promise was passed to us. Their voices are echoed in the halls of this building, which stands as a beacon and a symbol of the only path to the fulfillment of the UN Charter, which each and every state, each and every one of us, undertook to uphold – Multilateralism and Respect for International Law.

Diplomacy, peaceful settlement of disputes, cooperation over use of force and aggression. Laying down arms.

A world order that does not appease the aggressor, the violator of international legality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Only a few weeks after last year's General Assembly, on October 7th, the world was shocked by the unimaginable, horrendous brutality of the terrorist attack against innocent civilians.

No-one was spared by the blindness and cruelty of terror that Friday morning.

Women raped.

Children killed and abducted.

The elderly witnessing the burning flame of their loved ones; their future, extinguished before their eyes.

Their screams penetrating their hearts, forever changing the landscape of their lives. Penetrating the conscience of humanity.

There is never, ever, any justification for terror.

There is never, ever, any justification for such blatant disregard for human life and dignity.

No matter Where it comes from, no matter Whom it concerns. It concerns us all.

When rape is used as a weapon of war against women and girls, When children are abducted, our voice needs to be Loud, Clear, United, Unequivocal.

Those are our daughters.

Those are our children.

And we failed them.

Let me be clear – ours is a mission for the innocent. Innocence knows no country, age, race, nor religion.

Human pain and human dignity is equal for all. And it must be upheld always, in each and every context.

In the immediate aftermath of the October 7th attack, and as the humanitarian situation in Gaza deteriorated, the Republic of Cyprus acted. We acted on our moral responsibility to help the innocent civilians of Gaza - men, women, children - suffering abhorrent [] conditions no human should ever endure.

As a country that is an integral part of the region, Cyprus built on the longstanding bonds of friendship and trust with our neighbours. Fulfilling our duty as an anchor of stability in a turbulent sea, as the EU's lighthouse in the Eastern Mediterranean, we delivered the Amalthea maritime corridor to the international community. A lifeline of hope and humanity.

The Cyprus humanitarian corridor is a manifestation of the spirit and the letter of the UN Charter: Cooperation and Multilateralism. It aptly demonstrates the power of diplomacy, one of our most powerful tools.

Cyprus worked closely with regional and international partners – with the United Arab Emirates, the United States - with the concrete support of the European Union, the United Nations, united by a shared vision.

These guiding principles are the beacon of our engagement in international relations – the power of diplomacy as a Force for Good.

We have consistently manifested this commitment, and will continue to do so. Cyprus has acted, time and time again, as a regional evacuation hub at times of crisis. A safe bridge, a safe haven for civilians.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Palestinian children – that have been orphaned, forced to live in tents, with no access to the most basic items of existence - food, shelter, education, safety - are also Our Children.

No child should ever endure such nightmare. They did not cause this war. They do not deserve it.

They suffer in silence. Their cries are haunting our conscience.

We have also failed them.

The situation in Gaza is a desperate cry for us to act decisively. We must do all that is in our power, we must act - as leaders, as states, as international and regional organisations.

My country has emphatically stressed, the need for the respect of international humanitarian law, the protection of civilians, the rapid, safe and unhindered flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza. For the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

This war must end now. The suffering must stop now.

We have also consistently underlined and acted on the imperative of avoiding further escalation and destabilization in the region, and of the vital importance of preventing regional escalation. We are deeply alarmed by recent developments in our neighbouring Lebanon and stress the need for restraint. A step back must be taken from the brink.

Excellencies,

The wider region of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Greater Middle East – Cyprus's neighbourhood - is no doubt a turbulent region, faced with a multitude of complex challenges.

And yet, this neighbourhood is so much more than the prevailing narrative.

I will never accept the linear narrative of a region in turmoil. It is a narrative that ignores the complexities, but also the immense promise of the region and its people. The dynamics of opportunity and change that are unfolding. I have seen this journey closely, witnessed the fruit of cooperation in the region, experienced first-hand what countries of the region can achieve when they come together, behind a common vision for the future, committed to multilateralism, always in respect of international legality.

And I am convinced that the Eastern Mediterranean and the wider Middle East can move decisively beyond the prevailing narrative of being a region in turmoil and become a hub of stability, peace, and cooperation.

For the region to fulfil its promise, there has to be a path for lasting peace. There is an urgent need to reinvigorate the Middle East Peace Process and reach a political settlement, in line with the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions. There is no other path to walk. Out of the tragedy and suffering of the last year, let us exert every effort to ensure there is a lifeline to peace.

There are no shortcuts, no alternatives, or substitutes to a lasting peace. There are no frozen conflicts. The vacuum created in the absence of a viable peace becomes a breeding ground for crisis and conflict.

We can never be complacent. This is a painful lesson recent history teaches over and over again.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, a sovereign nation, came as yet another stark reminder of what is at stake if we do not defend and uphold the principles enshrined in the UN Charter.

Cyprus strongly condemns any breach of international peace and security effected through military action by any State, against the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of another State.

My country has stood in an unwavering manner, since the first day of Russian invasion, on the right side of history. Cyprus, itself a victim of invasion and continuing occupation, has steadfastly supported the unity, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of Ukraine.

Mr. President,
Your Excellencies,

The torch for peace in Cyprus awaits to be lit.

This year, on July 20th, we mourned 50 years since the Turkish invasion of Cyprus.

Through use of force, Turkey occupies a sovereign European state. It violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of an EU member state.

50 years, half a century, of continuing Turkish occupation of approximately 37% of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus. Of continuous violation of the UN Charter, international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law.

50 years that the displaced stoically await to return to their ancestral homes.

50 years that the mothers of the missing stoically await the remains of their loved ones.
To lay them to rest in peace.

Half a century of blatant disregard of UN Security Council Resolutions. Resolutions that have also called for the return of the fenced town of Varosha to its lawful inhabitants, and its transfer to the administration of the United Nations.

And yet, 50 years of resilience and hope by Cypriots.

Hope for peace. A burning desire and a deep belief by my people, by all Cypriots, that this cannot be the future of Cyprus. It cannot be the future of our children and of the generations to come. They deserve to live, to thrive in coexistence and co-creation in a reunified country, in conditions of viable peace. With the security that only their common home – the European Union - their space of safety and promise – can provide.

I am often asked if I am optimistic about peace in Cyprus after 50 years. Let me recall the words of Jean Monnet, one of the inspired founders of the European Union, when he proclaimed that –

“This is not a time for blind optimism or paralyzing pessimism. Now is the time to be determined”.

And so, the answer is that I am determined to work tirelessly and bravely for peace in Cyprus. To reunify my country and its people, in a modern, viable European state, with no troops of occupation, no foreign guarantees, which have no place in a European country. Anachronism cannot be the future.

I am determined to provide for all Cypriots all rights and fundamental freedoms that other Europeans enjoy. They deserve nothing less.

I am determined NOT to fail them.

To my Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot compatriots – I hear your call for peace. It has not faded over time. It has grown louder. More determined.

We look to the UN, to the UN Secretary General, who understands the imperative of reunification to fulfil the promise of peace. To deliver on the pledge of the UN Charter.

I am determined to continue exerting all efforts to resume negotiations for a viable solution to the Cyprus issue, within the only framework: the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions that call for a bizonal, bicomunal federation with political equality, as defined by the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, and fully in line with EU law, values and principles.

At a time when international legality and the principles of the UN Charter are under attack, now more than ever, any challenge to the agreed basis established by the UN, embodied in UN Security Council Resolutions, must be unequivocally rejected.

Revisionism, disregard for international law, must be given no oxygen, no space to breathe and burn.

Since the last time I stood before you in this Hall, we have exerted every effort to resume the peace process. There is no alternative to the path of peace.

I am committed and I am ready, to sit at the negotiating table today. Not tomorrow. Today.

I have clarity of vision for the future of Cyprus, for the future of our children in a reunified, prosperous, viable European state.

To Mr. Erdogan – history will judge us.

And history is unforgiving in the light it casts on leaders who have an opportunity to deliver peace, and instead choose the path of revisionism and disregard for international law.

Those who want to lead, must lead by example.

The voice of morality cannot have selective historical amnesia, or selective sensitivity to violations of international law.

The aggressor, the violator of international law, cannot be the advocate of legality, nor point the finger to others.

On this podium yesterday we heard Mr. Erdogan call for the disregard the UN Charter, the violation of UN Security Council Resolutions, and international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

And my response, the response of the international community is clear:

Illegality stemming from invasion, aggression and use of force CANNOT be recognized.

International law is not a la carte. Its interpretation does not change depending on who is the violator. It applies equally to all contexts, to all countries.

It applies to Turkey, a country that 50 years ago, used force in violation of the UN Charter, invaded a sovereign state, and is an occupation force in Cyprus.

It is an affront to this plenary to name an invasion a peace operation. Revisionism cannot change reality. Not now, not ever.

To Mr. Erdogan I also say: now is the time to deliver on your proclaimed commitment to international law and to peace. No country that believes in the moral superiority of its position refuses to sit on the negotiating table.

I adamantly believe that we can carve a new path, one of peace, cooperation and collaboration. We cannot change geography. It is an opportunity, not a curse. Turkey and Cyprus will always remain neighbours.

Let us change the narrative. Let us transform our proximity into a promise. Let us build together a legacy of peace, that can be transformative for the whole region.

Let us deliver on that promise.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In “Our Common Agenda” the Secretary General remarked that humanity faces a stark and urgent choice - “a breakdown or a breakthrough”.

I welcome the Secretary-General’s New Agenda for Peace and support multilateral efforts towards peace and security.

Collective action is urgently needed to address the changing nature of conflicts, including challenges posed by new technologies, the climate emergency, rising inequalities, and backtracking on human rights.

Halfway to the deadline, it is alarming that our world is off-track to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite some glimmers of hope, action, transformative solutions, and comprehensive reforms are urgently needed.

The Agendas and Resolutions are in place. We do not need more words. We need action.

Human rights constitute the backbone of the multilateral system. And it is a top priority of Cyprus foreign policy. Guided by our longstanding commitment to promoting, protecting, and fulfilling all human rights, as well as advancing and strengthening international Human Rights within the United Nations, Cyprus has announced its first-ever candidacy for the Human Rights Council for the period 2025-2027, with elections taking place this fall.

Our candidature stems from our deep dedication to promoting, protecting, and fulfilling basic human rights for all, as well as advancing and strengthening international Human Rights within the United Nations’ system.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world is at an inflection point.

Our children, the generations to come are watching. And they will hold us accountable.

The decisions we make today, the courage and vision we transform into action, have the potential to change the trajectory of the world.

We have an opportunity to come together and through multilateralism, by upholding the primacy of the UN Charter, to build a safer, more secure world.

The nature of the challenges we face is such that no country can address it on its own.

We need to come together.

“We, the peoples of the United Nations,

DETERMINED”.

Thank you.