

Opening Statement

Today, the process enters into a new phase as we resume full-fledged negotiations which will take place on equal footing under the good offices mission of the UN Secretary-General. It has not been easy to reach to this point. After more than four years of stalemate we had to work hard and be persistent to reach where we are today and I would like to thank both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot members of the working groups and technical committees as well as the UN facilitators for all their commendable efforts during the preparatory process. We will have to maintain this determination and dedicated work in order to reach our common goal, which is a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus problem.

I am aware that during our effort to establish a new partnership the two sides will have different views on certain aspects of the problem. However, I also believe that these differences are not insurmountable and with goodwill and compromise from both sides they can be bridged.

Despite the fact that four decades of UN-led negotiations could not deliver a solution, these nevertheless shaped the main parameters of a settlement and a huge body of work came into existence. Moreover, we as the two leaders have managed to pen down the 23 May and 1 July Agreements defining the basic structure which will have a Turkish Cypriot State and a Greek Cypriot State as Constituent States with equal status. We will also have at our disposal the material produced by the six working groups established pursuant to our 21 March Agreement. All this means that we are not starting from scratch and it should not take long to reach a settlement. I already expressed my sincere belief that with our strong determination it is possible to find a comprehensive settlement plan by the end of this year.

Beyond what has been agreed on 23 May and 1 July there are of course elements that we attach great importance to, such as: the continuation of the 1960 Treaties of Guarantee and of Alliance as an essential part of a settlement; safeguards to ensure that neither side can claim jurisdiction over the other; and maintaining the internal balance between the two sides in Cyprus as well as the external balance between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus.

I am hopeful that we will find ways to reach common ground on all these as well as the rest of the issues and be able to agree on a settlement plan that respects fully the political equality of the Turkish Cypriot people and Greek Cypriot people.

By doing so we will have a good chance of gaining the approval of the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots who will manifest their free democratic wills in their separate simultaneous referenda.

The ramifications of a settlement in Cyprus will be far reaching. There will be sustainable peace and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean region and both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots will be able to enjoy equally the benefits of the European Union membership.

In our new effort we will be assisted by the UN and I welcome the appointment of Alexander Downer as Special Adviser of the Secretary-General and look forward to

working closely with him in our joint effort to solve the Cyprus problem. We see this appointment as a further sign that the UN is committed to be actively involved in the process.

Time is not on the side of a settlement. We, as the two leaders, have a historic responsibility to find an early settlement to this protracted problem. Our island has been identified with problems and conflicts for far too long. We should negotiate constructively and positively in order to live up to the expectations and turn our island into one of peaceful coexistence.

Nicosia

3 September 2008.