



Opening Statement of Mr. Alexander Downer
Special Adviser of the Secretary-General
at the Launch of Negotiations on Cyprus
3 September 2008

Excellencies,

Today is an historic day for Cyprus, and I commend you both for all you have done to make this meeting possible. I am honoured to be a part of a process whose success will be critical for all Cypriots. This, of course, is your process, and we at the United Nations stand ready to support you at all junctures, according to your needs as you express them to us.

As we stand here at the cusp of renewed talks, it is worthwhile to acknowledge that significant progress has been made in a fairly short time to build confidence and create a solid foundation on which to start the formal negotiations. This has occurred because of your strong and steady leadership, and has been facilitated by the hundreds of meetings that have taken place at a technical level.

There have been difficult moments over the past months and there will likely be further difficulties and challenges ahead. At the same time, the Cyprus problem is not insurmountable and the negotiations which you begin today can, and must, have a successful outcome. With that in mind, one can identify several reasons for optimism.

You have built upon your longstanding ties and your commitment to a solution to forge a common vision, which is an essential element to any peace process. On the substance, your joint statements at recent meetings have gone much further than before to define the framework of a solution. To add to that, there is an enormous amount of work to draw upon.

The structure and pace of the process has been encouraging to date. Your broad agreement to have a rolling start to the talks will allow the working groups, under your guidance, to continue to underpin your efforts and further develop options for your consideration.

With respect to the work of the technical committees, you have already agreed on a number of measures to improve the daily lives of Cypriots. The timely implementation of these measures will show Cypriots in practical ways that the communities can live together and will also help give you the political space to move forward.

Excellencies,

You own this process and, as a result, your continuing leadership is the critical element to make it succeed. In that regard, bringing Cypriots to the conviction that reunification of the island will work for the greater happiness and prosperity of all Cypriots will, ultimately, be paramount.

At the same time, we wish to assure you that the support of the United Nations and the Secretary-General will be unwavering. My appointment as Special Adviser, to help you build on what has been achieved so far, and to find further common ground, is a strong signal of that commitment.

Let me reiterate that it is a true privilege and an honour for me to be part of this historic occasion, and I wish you every success in driving this process towards a solution. A comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue will be your enduring legacy and an inspiration to a troubled world.

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