

TURKEY'S PRIORITIES

FOR THE

62nd SESSION

OF THE

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

September 2007

CONTENTS

- The Current International Security Environment and the Role of the UN
- Turkey and the UN
- UN Reform
- Global economic and development issues
- Least Developed Countries
- Humanitarian Assistance
- More effective conflict prevention and peacekeeping
- Combating Terrorism
- Disarmament and non-proliferation
- Combating Illegal Migration
- Combating Drugs
- Human Rights
- Environmental Issues
- Gender Issues
- The Alliance of Civilizations Initiative
- Cyprus

The Current International Security Environment and the Role of the UN:

Much has changed since the United Nations had been founded 62 years ago. Within the past 20 years, in particular, the current international security environment has been going through a process of rapid and comprehensive change. The phenomenon of globalization is overwhelming. The insulating nature of borders in the classical sense no longer exists. Regional crises now affect the entire world, regardless of geographical distances. Security threats extend to poverty, environmental degradation, drug trafficking, epidemics, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means, terrorism and organized crime.

These new and evolving challenges make international cooperation more necessary now with a view to maintaining global security. In that respect, the United Nations continues to be a unique organization in bringing together 192 nations around universal values and principles for a common future. Its wide-ranging mandate covers not only conflict prevention and peace-building, but also post-conflict reconstruction, poverty eradication, sustainable development, human rights, health and environment related issues, among others.

The complexity of the current international scene, on the other hand, necessitates a more representative, fair, effective and functional United Nations in order to face the major problems of peace and security as well as other challenges of our time. The United Nations, as the sole universal international organization today, should be better equipped in order to address these new and complex challenges in the coming years and decades.

To this end, member States, UN agencies and the Secretariat should work together to ensure that the UN fulfills its objectives. Indeed, the UN must continue to play a pivotal role in seeking solutions to global problems. In this regard, effective multilateralism should continue to be the governing principle behind all UN actions.

We must strive to make the UN a venue where we consult, discuss and jointly act upon the challenges facing us all. The UN, by virtue of its universal founding principles, should be able to generate a strong political will for international cooperation, and as such, translate our commitments into concrete actions.

In fact, the outcomes of all major UN conferences and summits constitute a policy framework for UN's work. The Member States must ensure that these are implemented effectively. This requires full cooperation and coordination between the Member States and the UN system, as well as a clear focus on the objectives.

Turkey and the UN

Turkey attaches utmost importance to the effective functioning of the United Nations. In this regard, having reviewed our activities within and contributions to the UN, we have selected five major areas where we feel we could concentrate our efforts and provide an added value without in any way disengaging from other issues and responsibilities. They are:

- Concentrating more on all issues related to development;
- Further contributing to peacekeeping operations and peace building activities;
- Active participation in the humanitarian aid and relief operations of the UN;
- Combating terrorism in all its forms and encouraging effective international cooperation;
- Playing a moderating role to bridge cultures through dialogue and promotion of mutual understanding

Furthermore, located at the center stage of most of the issues that preoccupy and concern the international community, Turkey is also committed to actively support the international efforts to stabilize volatile areas. Our objective to attain lasting peace and greater cooperation in our region extending from the Balkans to the Middle East and beyond finds expression in our desire to consolidate stability and guard the peace in a wide geography.

Indeed, Turkey employs a multi-dimensional foreign policy that reconciles different continents and cultures. Whether in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean or in the Black Sea basin, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia, Turkey's foreign policy continues to contribute to the global role of the UN.

It is with this understanding that the Turkish Government has declared its candidature for a non-permanent seat at the Security Council for the years 2009-2010.

Enjoying membership in a multitude of international organizations representing various regions and cultures and having accumulated vast experience on matters of international significance, Turkey feels well placed to contribute to the UN efforts in the service of international peace and stability.

Turkey's contributions to the maintenance of international peace and security, its provision of development and humanitarian aid and its regional role as a bulwark of stability make it amply qualified to become a non-permanent member on the Security Council.

We believe Turkey's desire to serve on the Council deserves a favorable consideration of the Member-States.

UN Reform

UN reform is an essential element to make the UN more effective and relevant in today's international environment. Constructive negotiations on the pending reform issues to make the UN work better should be continued in order to reach a wider consensus. The outcome of reform should strengthen the Organization. In this respect, all aspects of the reform process should receive equal attention from the membership.

The establishment of the Peace Building Commission, the Human Rights Council and the Central Emergency Response Fund, as well as the adoption of the counter-terrorism strategy are important milestones in this process. There is also progress, albeit slow, on management reform and mandate review.

A comprehensive reform of the UN system cannot be completed without the **reform of the Security Council**. Security Council reform is essential in order to make it broadly representative, efficient and transparent and to further enhance its effectiveness and the legitimacy and implementation of its decisions.

The Security Council should have a more democratic and equitable composition that corresponds to contemporary international realities. An expansion of the Security Council in the non-permanent category will better reflect the principle of sovereign equality -- the very foundation upon which the UN is built. Such an expansion can achieve the objectives of making the Security Council more democratic, equitably representative, transparent, effective and accountable. The criteria for membership should be reasonable and achievable to ensure equitable representation.

As regards the categories of membership, "non-permanent seats with the possibility of immediate re-election" and "extended seats, which would be for a longer period than the regular two-year term, but without the possibility of re-election" are both viable options. "Extended seats, which would be for a longer period than the regular two-year term, but with the possibility of re-election" can also be considered.

The question of veto rights also needs to be considered further. It would be advisable to work further on possibilities to restrict the use of the veto or politically binding commitments.

While deliberating on UN reform, it is important to avoid approaches that would have divisive effects on the membership of the UN, threatening the overall reform process. The General Assembly should opt for a formula that can attract the widest possible agreement of the Member States.

Flexibility, transparency and constructiveness should be the key words while conducting the consultations.

An integral component of Security Council reform is its **working methods**. A more transparent, efficient and interactive Council functioning in increased cooperation and coordination with the main UN bodies will enhance the credibility of the whole UN system. The steps already taken by the Security Council to improve its working methods are promising. In any case, efforts to improve working methods should be continued.

The **General Assembly** is the chief representative organ of the United Nations. It has a crucial role in policy making and standard setting. Its role and authority should therefore be strengthened. However, it is burdened with a heavy and static agenda, which leads to repetitive debates every year. Repetitive resolutions are adopted at every session, which cannot be implemented most of the time. In order to ensure credibility of the General Assembly, and thus the United Nations, there needs to be a follow-up mechanism for the implementation of these resolutions. The General Assembly needs a more focused agenda that better reflects the contemporary challenges. It could identify priority areas for discussion for every session, which could allow for more focused and result-oriented deliberations. The relationship between the General Assembly and other principal organs should be strengthened in order to avoid duplication while at the same time taking the necessary measures for better coordination.

The revitalization of the General Assembly, increasing the efficiency, effectiveness and accountability of the Secretariat and management reform will allow the UN to enhance its authority as well as its capacity to address the challenges of our times.

The **Economic and Social Council** (ECOSOC) plays a central role in the oversight and coordination of UN work in the economic, social and environmental fields, including the promotion and protection of human rights and gender equality. As mentioned in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, “the Council should play a major role in the overall coordination of funds, programmes and agencies, ensuring coherence among them and avoiding duplication of mandates and activities.” ECOSOC’s efficiency and effectiveness should be improved, by allowing for a more interactive and result-oriented debate on major issues. This might require modifications on the agenda and a reorganization of the work of various commissions and committees for improved coordination with the ECOSOC.

There is a need to streamline the UN activities in the fields of environment, development and humanitarian aid and other cross-cutting subjects and to take measures to strengthen UN administration. The report of the **High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence** contains a lot of food for thought for future discussions on making the UN system more effective in these areas.

The High Level Panel has accurately concluded that the UN’s operational activities at the country level need to be further strengthened and better coordinated. The “**one UN**” approach will certainly improve the effectiveness of UN activities in partner countries and will generate considerable benefits for them. The pilot countries will be individual test cases for this challenging initiative.

The mandate review exercise should remain a priority for the Member States of the United Nations. In the long term, all mandates should be periodically reviewed in a systematic way. Mandate review will strengthen the Organization and increase its efficiency and effectiveness for the benefit of all Member States.

Global Economic and Development Issues

Eradicating poverty is one of the greatest global challenges facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development and world peace. It is part of the collective duty of the Member States to achieve the **Millenium Development Goals** with a view to ensuring global economic stability and prosperity, as well as a safe, fair and just environment to live in. The timely realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals should be a priority in this respect.

The United Nations has a critical and leading role to play in development related issues. The development cooperation initiatives and projects of the UN should be prepared in close cooperation with national authorities in line with their priorities and development needs. The UN should advise Governments, convene stakeholders, provide technical assistance, advocate international standards and coordinate the multifaceted contributions of the NGOs, the private sector and donors which extend their support.

A “one-size fits all” approach should be avoided and development cooperation should be responsive to the specific needs, priorities and conditions of each country. Development cooperation should be demand-driven and pursued on the basis of national strategies and plans of developing countries. Projects and activities which focus on democratic governance, poverty reduction, women’s empowerment, information and communication technologies, environment and sustainable development are of particular importance.

The international community should continue to increase its efforts to address the challenges in the field of global development by supporting developing countries particularly in the areas of capacity building and financial assistance. Necessary investments must be made and the principles of good governance and accountability at the national and international levels should be supported in order to reduce poverty and income disparity, as well as to protect human capital and environment.

The problems of development should be addressed in a coherent and integrated way, by taking into account the linkage between different aspects of development such as poverty, epidemics and environmental degradation, and domestic and international security.

Cooperation and interaction among the United Nations, Bretton Woods Institutions, the WTO and other international financial institutions should also be strengthened in order to address cross-cutting issues of sustainable development, such as foreign aid, trade, financial stability, know-how and technology and development policy. The effective implementation of the Monterrey Consensus on financing for development should also be supported.

Turkey, as an emerging donor country, is actively supporting and participating in the international efforts for the eradication of poverty. The Official Development Assistance (which comprises humanitarian and technical/development assistance) provided by Turkey reached 700 million US Dollars in 2006, corresponding to 0,17 per cent of Turkey's GDP. While providing humanitarian aid, Turkey has always endeavored to engage in close multilateral cooperation, especially with the UN Specialized Agencies in such operations. In this regard, Turkey is proud to be referred to as one of the significant donors in the efforts to overcome the acute food crisis in Africa by the World Food Program.

Least Developed Countries

Poverty, hunger, unemployment, lack of healthcare and education, as well as environmental degradation are the main sources of instability in developing countries.

The capacity of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to overcome these challenges through growth and sustainable development is impeded by various structural constraints. Geographical disadvantages faced by landlocked and island LDCs further aggravate the effects of these impediments. Thus, the LDCs are yet to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by globalization.

Naturally, the main drive for development should come from the LDCs themselves. However, national efforts and policies of LDCs must also be complemented by developed partners through providing adequate resources and technical assistance.

It is the collective responsibility of the international community to help LDCs eradicate these problems. One cannot speak about universal peace, harmony, stability and cooperation unless we are able to provide means of decent living to every human being.

Turkey is strongly committed to do her share in addressing the needs of the LDCs. As a middle income country itself, Turkey is in a better position to understand the requirements of the LDCs and actively participate in South-South cooperation.

Turkey's role as an emerging donor is steadily increasing. We will continue our assessed and voluntary contributions to various United Nations funds and programs. In parallel, we will sustain and increase our contributions to other international and regional organizations.

Turkey hosted the United Nations Ministerial Conference of the Least Developed Countries on "Making Globalization Work for the LDCs" in Istanbul on 9-10 July 2007, as a result of which İstanbul Declaration "Time for Action" was adopted. Turkey's decision to host this conference is a testimony of her desire and determination to support the LDCs. Turkey is ready to host future meetings in order to keep the Istanbul spirit alive and she will be the voice of the LDCs in the international fora where they are not represented.

Humanitarian Assistance

In today's world, human vulnerability is greater in crisis situations both in natural disasters and other emergencies. The last decade has been marked by disasters with greater levels of loss of life, property and material damage, particularly in the Least Developed Countries. In terms of complex emergencies, the factors contributing to human insecurity has become closely associated with the current nature of conflicts.

The UN has a leading role in the coordination and delivery of **humanitarian assistance**. For this reason, the UN web of humanitarian issues should be enhanced in all forms and dimensions to effectively meet the needs of the day.

In order to ensure the effective functioning of the institutions of humanitarian assistance as well as the relevant NGOs and to avoid any hindrance or conflict in the post-disaster period, an all encompassing and universally accepted "International Disaster Response Law" should be adopted at the earliest convenience. Post-disaster assistance should not only be confined to economic aid, but should also include various forms of social and psychological support.

Turkey, in a disaster-prone geography, has a strong tradition of responding to those in need. Learning from its own experience, Turkey is an ardent advocate of international solidarity and partnership to build a safer world, to save human lives and to protect our environment and believes that sustainable development can be possible through a sustainable and collective strategy in this regard.

With these thoughts in mind, Turkish humanitarian assistance has diversified and increased in recent years. In 2005 and 2006, Turkish cash and in-kind humanitarian assistance exceeded 500 million US Dollars reaching 25 countries in different continents.

More Effective Conflict Prevention, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding

Preventive diplomacy continues to be one of the major means for the maintenance of international peace and security. The UN has a distinctive role in **conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding**. The UN peacekeeping missions of today have evolved and expanded into an integrated system of many elements.

The Organization should be able to respond to today's complex and challenging peacekeeping requirements. Resource generation, rapid deployment capability, safety and security of personnel, post-conflict peacebuilding and development, cooperation with regional organizations are among the key issues which require the attention of the Member States.

Post-conflict peacebuilding is an area of vital importance for the UN. The establishment of the Peace Building Commission as an advisory body is a welcome development in this regard. The PBC will play a crucial role in providing more sustained, coordinated and focused support for reconstruction and development to countries emerging from conflict. It is in fact the core of the new peacebuilding architecture inside the UN. The Commission is expected improve coordination both within and beyond the UN system by bringing all relevant actors together and keeping them engaged in the long-term recovery effort.

The Commission needs the support of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the ECOSOC in order to implement its recommendations. It should also continue to closely cooperate with all relevant actors, identify priorities and draw lessons learned.

The Organizational Committee of the Commission should take utmost care when establishing country-specific groups. These groups should be formed in an inclusive and representative manner so that they could reflect the views and voices of all relevant stakeholders.

The "Peacebuilding Support Office" and "Peacebuilding Fund", will play a crucial role for the effective functioning of the Commission. The success of the PBC is very much dependent on securing a sound financial support to the Peacebuilding Fund. The Fund should be able to ensure immediate release of resources needed to launch peacebuilding activities, particularly in the African Continent.

Recognizing the importance of the PBC Turkey contributed 800.000 US Dollars to its Trust Fund following its first meeting in 2006.

Combating Terrorism

Terrorism is a clear and present danger for the entire world. This scourge, in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, wherever and whatever purpose, aims at the destruction of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy. It is a crime against humanity.

No matter what pretext terrorists use for their acts, terrorism does not have any justification. Terrorism under all circumstances, regardless of the alleged motives should be condemned unreservedly and terrorists should be brought to justice on the basis of “extradite or prosecute”.

This necessitates a unified, decisive and coordinated response at national, regional and international levels. The success of the struggle against terrorism depends on unwavering compliance with all the relevant international conventions as well as all UN General Assembly and Security Council Resolutions.

The relevant Security Council Resolutions currently constitute a solid and comprehensive basis for combating terrorism on a universal scale. In this framework, Turkey fully adheres to all these Resolutions and extends its full cooperation to the relevant Security Council Committees.

Having always emphasized the importance of international solidarity and cooperation in combating terrorism, Turkey welcomed the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted by the UN General Assembly on 8 September 2006. Turkey also attaches great importance to the ratification of the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism and deems it essential that all members of the international community become party to this important international instrument as soon as possible.

The conclusion of deliberations on the “Comprehensive Convention on Terrorism” is also of great importance to convey the resolve of the international community in its collective stance against this grave threat. As a party to nearly all international conventions and protocols in countering terrorism, Turkey is determined to facilitate and expedite the conclusion of this Convention, including a legal and comprehensive definition of terrorism.

The scope of terrorism has reached such proportions that it calls for the active engagement of the military and security forces, ultimately making them primary targets for terrorists. Therefore, any definition which omits terrorist acts perpetrated against military and security forces would be incomplete. A clear message must be given that there are no legitimate targets for terrorists and that terrorism, whatever its cause, will not be tolerated.

The convening of a high-level conference under the auspices of the United Nations to formulate a joint organized response of the international community to terrorism is also desirable.

Disarmament and Non-Proliferation

The international security environment has changed dramatically in recent years, which poses new challenges to **disarmament and non-proliferation**. Non-state actors, terrorists and states in non-compliance with non-proliferation and disarmament obligations and delays in the fulfillment of nuclear disarmament engagements and obligations, all challenge the delicate balance that the system of treaties has established over the last four decades.

The UN should be able to address and respond to those challenges. UN Security Council Resolutions 1540 (2004) and 1673 (2006) are steps taken in the right direction in facing the challenges of non-proliferation and ensuring international cooperation.

The UN should play a more active role to uphold the existing international disarmament regimes and, when necessary, enhance their effectiveness by appropriate means.

Combating Illegal Migration

Illegal migration has become a growing issue in the world. Wide income gap among regions is the fundamental cause forcing people to leave their homes to seek better living conditions elsewhere.

Combating illegal migration is not simply about taking security measures but also about opening dialogue among concerned parties and trying to understand the root causes of the phenomenon with a view to finding win-win solutions in a humanitarian fashion. Cooperation and dialogue at international level among source, transit and destination countries is instrumental in order to reduce the impact of irregular migration.

The best way to tackle illegal migration is to open channels for legal, regulated migration. The more legal migration opportunities are created, the less people might be tempted to resort to irregular ways and means. Furthermore, more attention should be paid to the problems facing legally residing migrants in foreign countries.

Development and aid are inseparably interlinked with illegal migration. The UN is a particularly suitable platform to address the problems and opportunities created by this global phenomenon. The Millennium Development Goals and the outcome of the UN General Assembly High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development are of crucial importance in addressing these issues.

Combating Illegal Drug Trafficking

The **fight against illicit trafficking of drugs** can only be addressed by extensive cooperation, exchange of information and expertise within the international community. The UN constitutes an ideal platform for these endeavors.

The UN should further strengthen its efforts aimed at providing assistance to the countries most affected by the illegal production and trafficking of illicit drugs, through the implementation of projects on enhancing law enforcement capabilities, promotion of regional initiatives and the provision of alternative livelihood programs.

The problem of supply and demand should be addressed at the same time while effective reduction strategies are developed and implemented.

As a leading country in the fight against the illicit trafficking of drugs, Turkey is ready and willing to provide every assistance to international efforts. The Turkish International Academy against Drugs and Organized Crime (TADOC), working with 49 countries, serves as a good example of Turkey's efforts for regional and international cooperation in the combat against this menace.

Human Rights

Today, observance of contemporary standards pertaining to **human rights, democracy and the rule of law** has indeed become a fundamental criterion for the respectable members of the international community.

The promotion and protection of human rights has always been one of the main pillars of the UN system since its inception. This cause also serves international peace and security, which are the fundamental goals enshrined in the UN Charter.

The underlying need for cooperation at the international level stems from the very basic fact that no country is flawless in terms of human rights. The UN human rights system provides for a desired cooperation of global scale to serve the common goal of elevating standards, norms and principles on promotion and protection of human rights to the benefit of all members of the international community.

Striving to achieve this ultimate aim requires a collective endeavor. It is for the benefit of all that cooperation reigns over confrontation in the UN human rights system, and that it is constructive. Promotion and protection of human rights can best be achieved through cooperation in a spirit of solidarity and mutual understanding rather than confrontation and polarization among countries.

Efforts for an overall improvement in the situation of human rights around the world, facilitating the work of civil society, combating torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, countering violence against women, eliminating all forms of intolerance and discrimination, advancing rights of migrant workers and their families and to the issue of terrorism and human rights deserve particular attention.

Efforts for better integration of the human dimension into the UN system should also be supported. For the past 50 years, the focus in the UN has been mainly on articulating, codifying and enshrining fundamental rights and freedoms. With the advent of the new Human Rights Council (HRC), the cause of human rights in the UN system has ushered into a new era. Within the overall reform process of the UN, the establishment of the HRC is a welcome development. It is essential that the functioning of the HRC is based on dialogue and cooperation while avoiding confrontation. The Council should contribute to build a credible culture of dialogue and cooperation to strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights. The Council should also be able to be responsive to developments on the ground. Those states which are not members of the HRC could also play a conciliatory and constructive role in the work of the HRC.

Cooperation with the special *rapporteurs* and working groups is also of particular importance. Such bodies with thematic mandates must continue their valuable work by focusing on a broad range of countries in a balanced manner.

Standard setting and standard-development constitute complementary means to address gaps in the legal instruments of the UN human rights system. A major shortcoming is that existing legal instruments do not specifically cover multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination. Special attention needs to be given to such forms of discrimination and intolerance as racism, xenophobia and defamation of religions with a view to avoiding new fault lines.

As marked by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, respect for human rights is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. Over the years a whole network of human rights instruments and mechanisms has been developed to ensure the primacy of human rights in the international community under the UN system.

Given the fact that the UN is the only global organization that yet reflects many diverse constituencies and priorities, the principles of universality, objectivity, impartiality and non-selectivity should guide its works. In order to avoid polarization of views which could cause undesired ramifications on the credibility of the whole UN human rights system, it is important to abstain from maximalist approaches while targeting to reach the widest possible consensus on human rights issues.

Such an inclusive approach will definitely further strengthen the role of UN as a global body where the members of the international community can envision the outside world through the same perspectives by embracing common goals and values for the promotion and protection of human rights. In this regard, responsibility lies with each and every member of the UN and no efforts should be spared in this noble cause.

In fact, the need for dialogue among different cultures continues to appear high on the agenda of the international community. Such dialogue can be attained better on the basis of a genuine respect and understanding among various cultures, which are represented under the common roof of the UN human rights system of a universal nature.

Environmental Issues

The world community under the lead of United Nations, made rapid and very significant progress concerning **environmental protection and management**. Environmental policies of both developed and developing countries were reshaped at the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002. However, there is still much to do.

Environmental problems facing our world have reached serious dimensions. Our common future at the global level depends essentially on the concrete measures and actions we have to carry out at the national and regional levels.

It is only through such concerted action that we can protect the environment. All countries must carry out more intensive efforts to tackle with environmental challenges, with developed countries taking clear lead.

We should take necessary measures and determine the priority fields of action, such as climate change, sustainable management of natural resources (soil, water, natural areas and coastal zones), integrated pollution control, prevention and management of wastes, use of renewable energy, improvement of urban environment, improvement of health and safety.

International organizations such as the United Nations, the OECD and other international institutions, global and regional fora, have been promoting and coordinating the efforts for the joint confrontation of global environmental problems on a multilateral level.

The United Nations has a critical role in addressing these issues. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was established as one of the productive consequences of the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the human environment. It provides a basis for comprehensive consideration and coordinated action within the United Nations system on the problems of environment. Major international agreements and conventions covering a wide range of environmental issues such as climate change, biological diversity, combating desertification, control of movements of hazardous wastes, ozone layer, illegal trade in endangered species, have been elaborated and implemented under UNEP's auspices.

Despite all accomplishments, UN's environmental activities and the system of environmental governance need to be further strengthened. Environmental considerations must be better integrated in the UN's operational activities in the field. Coordination among the relevant UN agencies in the field of environment must be strengthened.

In this regard, efforts for the improvement of the institutional capacity of UNEP should be supported by all Member States. The UNEP could actually evolve into a UN Organization for Environment, with a revised mandate as well as stable and adequate financial resources.

Gender Issues

Women around the world play a crucial role in social progress, economic growth and development. Empowerment of women has a dramatic impact on the well-being of the family and the society; developing their skills and competencies is strongly linked with their full and active participation in every sphere of public life. Therefore, **gender equality** stands as a prerequisite to achieving all the Millennium Development Goals.

Indeed, as reaffirmed by the international community at the World Summit in 2005, the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted during the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 is considered essential for attaining and upholding the Millennium Development Goals.

At the Millennium Summit, Member States have also agreed to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to which the majority of Member States are party. The Convention is an important international instrument in promoting the status of women worldwide. An increasing number of Member States should consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention if the issue of women's rights is to be addressed more comprehensively at the international level.

Taking into account that gender issues constitute a prominent place in the agenda of the United Nations, the Organization should be more coherent, better coordinated and better resourced in tackling gender equality and the empowerment of women. This approach should be first and foremost reflected in the organizational structures of the UN. The Secretary General's support for replacing several structures dealing with such issues with one dynamic UN entity deserves merit in this regard.

Commitment to gender equality should remain a mandate of the entire UN system. As gender equality and women's empowerment are important cross-cutting issues, they need to be fully integrated, applied and adequately resourced in parallel with the efforts of the international community towards achieving sustainable development.

Alliance of Civilizations

In light of the events of recent years, a heightened sense of increased polarization and lack of understanding between the prevailing cultures and thought systems of our time now exists in the international environment. This has increasingly become an immediate concern for international peace and security. Consequently, the need for a comprehensive and collective effort to counter such a trend has become more crucial than ever.

This need makes imperative the search for a meaningful and operational dialogue that entails active and concrete steps to eliminate extremism, cross-cultural prejudices and misunderstandings among societies. The Alliance of Civilizations initiative, co-sponsored by the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey aims at facilitating harmony and dialogue by highlighting the common denominator of different cultures and religions and at establishing a paradigm of mutual respect among societies.

The finalization and presentation to the UN Secretary General in Istanbul of the Report by the High Level Group of 20 internationally renowned intellectuals from all over the world representing different cultures and religions marked an important milestone for this initiative. Moreover, the appointment of former Portuguese President H.E. Jorge Sampaio as the High Representative of the AoC has set the implementation phase in motion.

A “Group of Friends” has been established, consisting of countries which have expressed an intention to support the initiative. To date, the Group has more than 65 member countries. It is of utmost importance to have the contribution of as many countries and international actors as possible to put the recommendations of the High Level Group into practice.

The globalized world of today with its high level of interdependence requires societies to understand one another in greater depth than ever before. Consequently, employing cross-cultural skills that facilitate mutual understanding among societies has become a key condition for peaceful relations in the 21st century. Societies with multi-cultural experiences are particularly well-placed to contribute to this objective.

Cyprus

Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) maintain their vision for finding a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus issue without further delay under the good offices mission of the Secretary-General, and on the basis of the UN Comprehensive Settlement Plan and well-established UN parameters. The Turkish side has clearly demonstrated its resolve in this regard, and will continue to do so.

In line with this vision, the TRNC President Mr Talat, in his recent meeting with Mr Papadopoulos, proposed the adjustment and speeding up the 8 July process with a view to engaging in substantive negotiations for attaining a comprehensive solution before the end of 2008. However, this result oriented proposal of the Turkish Cypriot side has not been accepted by the Greek Cypriot leadership.

At this juncture, the expectation of the Turkish side as well as the international community from the Greek Cypriot leadership is not to take steps generating further tension in the region, but to make positive and concrete contributions to the efforts aimed at finding a comprehensive settlement, which have been at a standstill since the UN Comprehensive Settlement Plan was rejected by the Greek Cypriots in April 2004.

In this regard, the Greek Cypriot administration's recent attempts to delimit maritime jurisdiction areas and explore oil and natural gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean at the expense of legitimate rights and interests of the Turkish Cypriot people is of great concern. These unilateral acts are also in contradiction with the established principles of international law. The Turkish side will continue to act responsibly in respect of the international law and expects all parties concerned to act in the same manner.