

TURKEY'S PRIORITIES

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The Current International Security Environment and the Role of the UN

Much has changed since the United Nations was founded 62 years ago. Within the past 20 years, in particular, the international security environment has evolved in an unprecedented manner and the process of transformation is still underway. Today, the process of globalization is engulfing whole regions around the world, posing both manifold challenges and opportunities.

The world has become ever more interdependent. Regional developments now affect the entire world, regardless of geographical distance. Furthermore, while conventional conflicts remain a formidable challenge, we have witnessed the emergence of new risks and threats, such as terrorism, WMD proliferation, ethnic and religious fundamentalism, racial and cultural discrimination, organized crime, illegal trafficking of all kinds and environmental degradation.

In light of these new and evolving challenges, effective international cooperation has now become even more essential for global security and stability. In that respect, the relevance and importance of the United Nations as a universal organization bringing together 192 nations around common values and principles has further increased. First and foremost, the element of legitimacy, which is of the utmost importance to successfully address today's complex challenges, is now more reliant on UN engagement.

Furthermore, the problem areas that require a strong UN response have constantly evolved too. Today, the UN's wide-ranging mandate covers not only conflict prevention and peace-building, but also post-conflict reconstruction, poverty eradication, sustainable development and advancement of environment-related issues, to name just a few.

Against this backdrop, it is obvious that we need a more effective and functional United Nations. The efforts to reform the UN thus constitute an extremely important endeavour. Effective multilateralism is key to lasting peace and security and we should all exert every effort to ensure that the United Nations deliver this goal in a meaningful way.

To this end, we must strive to make the UN a venue where we not only consult and discuss, but also act together. By virtue of its universal founding principles, the UN should be able to generate a strong political will for international cooperation, and translate our commitments into concrete action. This requires full cooperation and coordination between the Member States and the entire UN system. Turkey is fully committed to help realize this objective.

Turkey and the UN

The United Nations holds a central place in Turkish foreign policy and we therefore attach the utmost importance to the effective functioning of the UN. Turkey believes that its foreign policy objectives are best served when the core values and principles enshrined in the UN Charter are upheld universally. The culture of peace can be sustained and advanced only with an effective and credible UN leading the global efforts in this direction.

Turkey is therefore dedicated to promoting the three main pillars of the UN, namely maintenance of security, ensuring sustainable development and advancement of human rights, in a balanced manner. In our view, these objectives are inextricably linked to each other and none of them can be achieved without meaningful progress on the other two.

Turkey feels itself particularly well-placed to be able to help the UN achieve its objectives. With the emergence of new challenges to international security, Turkey has found itself at the epicenter of a host of conventional and asymmetrical risks and threats which characterize the new security landscape ranging from the Balkans to the Middle East, from the Mediterranean to the Caucasus and Afghanistan.

In today's world, our security cannot be ensured by military means alone. With its vibrant economy, strong democratic tradition, social dynamism, cultural richness and well-trained armed forces, Turkey feels itself particularly well-poised to play a distinct role in contributing to global stability.

Turkey is therefore committed, including in the UN, to a more active and multi-faceted foreign policy approach, which is dedicated to generate, in cooperation with its partners, peace and stability in its wider region. It is also 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.

Looking back into the recent past and the efforts deployed by Turkey in addressing those common risks, threats and opportunities alike, one can see a consistent record confirming Turkey's potential. First of all, Turkey's humanitarian and development assistance has been steadily rising in recent years enabling us to be designated as an "emerging donor". Secondly, Turkey's level of participation in the UN and other peacekeeping missions ranging from Haiti to Lebanon has shown a constant increase, making us an important contributor to such operations. Finally, Turkey is one of those countries which are well placed to play a moderating role in world affairs, bridging cultures through dialogue and mutual understanding, as evident by our co-sponsorship of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, along with Spain.

Furthermore, Turkey's active policies in forging regional cooperation schemes in its immediate region; its crucial standing in energy security issues due to its emerging role as a hub of energy routes; its dedication to reach out to and enhance its relations with far regions like Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, East Asia and the Pacific islands; and its membership in a multitude of international organizations representing various regions and cultures are also worth mentioning within the context of Turkey's actual and possible contributions to world peace.

In light of the foregoing, Turkey feels that it has indeed an added value to bring to the work of the UN. By the same token, we also believe that Turkey's contributions to the maintenance of international peace and security and its regional role as a bulwark of stability make it amply qualified to become a non-permanent member on the UN Security Council. We hope that Turkey's desire to serve on the Council will receive the favorable consideration of the Member-States.

UN Reform

UN reform is not a one-time project but it is an ongoing process aiming at making the UN more effective and relevant in today's international political scene. The momentum reached in this process over the last five years should be preserved and efforts should be re-doubled to conclude the pending reform issues with the continuing support of Member States. All aspects of the reform process should receive proper attention.

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 were recorded among the important milestones in the UN reform process. A number of management reforms aimed at making the Secretariat more transparent, more accountable and more ethical have been adopted. A pilot project in eight countries testing the new UN "Delivering as One" concept for development assistance has signalled encouraging progress. Promising steps have been taken on the revitalization of the General Assembly and the mandate review.

Yet a comprehensive reform of the UN system cannot be completed without the reform of the Security Council. 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.

While deliberating on the UN Security Council reform, it is important to avoid approaches that would have divisive effects on the membership. If the membership is left divided over a result which does not enjoy general agreement, this could undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the Council and would not serve the very purpose of the reform process. The common objective is to seek an outcome which will garner the widest possible agreement among the membership. Only such outcome will make the Security Council more democratic, accountable, responsive and representative.

A more transparent, efficient and interactive Council will enhance the credibility of the whole UN system. The steps already taken by the Security Council to improve its working methods are promising. Yet, there is still room for further progress and efforts to this end should be continued.

The General Assembly is the chief representative organ of the United Nations. It has a crucial role in policy matters and in setting standard. Its role and authority should be strengthened. There needs to be a permanent and effective follow-up mechanism for the implementation of General Assembly resolutions. It should continue to 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. Increasing the efficiency, effectiveness and accountability of the Secretariat 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 High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence 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.

Following the report of the High Level Panel and the report of the Secretary-General containing his comments thereon, Co-Chairs of the General Assembly’s consultative process on System-wide Coherence provided a fair and balanced report. It is now expected that the Assembly and the inter-governmental work will further focus exclusively and in an integrated manner on Delivering as One at country and regional level and the related areas of Harmonization of Business Practices, Funding, Governance, and Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

The mandate review has proven to be a useful exercise and the progress achieved at the 62nd Session should continue in areas to be determined in accordance with the priorities of the General Assembly. In the long term, a more structured and effective mechanism should periodically review all mandates in a systematic way. This will strengthen the Organization and increase its efficiency and effectiveness for the benefit of all Member States.

Global Economic and Development Issues-MDGs

Eradicating poverty is one of the greatest global challenges facing the world today and a basic requirement for sustainable development and world peace. It is part of the collective duty of the Member States to achieve the Millennium 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.

We have already passed the halfway point to the target date of 2015. This is an opportune moment to take stock of our progress and to identify our shortcomings since the Millennium Summit in 2000 and chart the way forward for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

Our global performance report so far is a mixed one. Unfortunately we are seriously off track on some of the Goals. Some regions of the developing and the least developed countries alike are further behind than others. Against this background, we have no option other than shifting our efforts into a higher gear by efficiently harnessing all the available tools towards this end. The Millennium Development Goals belong to us all. To reach those Goals on time, we need a combined effort, in which developed and developing countries, governments as well as the private sector act together. We should also pay more attention to the wide-ranging negative implications of climate change as well as recent food and energy price rises.

The United Nations has a central role in the global development agenda. The UN's 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 contributions of NGOs, the private sector and donors.

A "one-size fits all" approach should be avoided and development cooperation should be responsive to the specific needs and priorities of each country. Development cooperation should be demand-driven and pursued on the basis of national strategies and devised by the 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 support developing countries particularly in the area of capacity building. Principles of good governance and accountability should be supported in order to help reduce poverty and income disparity, as well as to protect human capital and environment.

Cooperation and interaction between 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. The Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development, which will be held in Doha on 29 November-2 December 2008 will provide us with the opportunity to review the implementation of the Monterrey consensus. Turkey, for its part, will strive to make this conference a success.

Turkey, as an emerging donor country actively supports and participates in international efforts for the eradication of poverty. In this regard, Official Development Assistance (ODA) is one of the main tools in achieving the Internationally Agreed Development Goals, including the MDGs on time.

The ODA offered by Turkey has therefore been steadily increasing over the recent years. Initially, our contributions rather focused on our immediate vicinity. But in time and in parallel with our efforts to further deepen our relations with the Least Developed Countries, the share of African and Asian countries in Turkey's total foreign assistance has increased steadily. The ODA Turkey provided for the last three years has ranged between 600 to 700 million US Dollars per year. When we include, for the same period, the aid provided by our private sector and the NGOs, the figure for our total assistance ranges between 1.1 to 1.7 billion US Dollars per year.

Humanitarian Assistance

In today's world, human vulnerability in crisis situations, both in natural disasters and other emergencies had become rather acute. The last decade has been marked by disasters with greater loss of life and material damage, particularly in the Least Developed Countries. The UN has a leading role in the coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance. In order to ensure the effective functioning of the institutions involved in humanitarian assistance as well as the relevant NGOs and to avoid any hindrance or conflict in the post-disaster period, the necessary legal ground should be completed. Post-disaster assistance should not only be confined to economic aid, but should also include various forms of social support.

Located in a disaster-prone geography, Turkey has a strong tradition of responding to those in need. Learning from its own experience, Turkey is consistent advocate of international solidarity and partnership to build a safer world, to save human lives and to protect our environment.

With these thoughts in mind, Turkish humanitarian assistance has diversified and increased in recent years. While providing 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.

More Effective Conflict Prevention, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding

Securing and maintaining peace is still the most demanding and difficult task for the international community. Preventive diplomacy undoubtedly constitutes the major pillar in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding and the UN continues to have the primary role in that regard.

The UN Peacekeeping Missions have evolved and expanded into an integrated system of many elements. The crisis situations are usually complex and military means are insufficient to prevent or resolve a crisis. Turkey supports the Secretary General's efforts towards ensuring that the United Nations has the tools it needs to carry out its vital function of proactive engagement in preventive diplomacy. Turkey also welcomes Secretary General's call for deepening the engagement of the United Nations system in support of the sub-regional organizations as well as facilitating the short-term assignment of UN personnel in support of capacity-building.

Post-conflict peacebuilding is an area of vital importance for the UN. Successful outcomes would be more likely if security considerations and needs are addressed at a very early stage in post-conflict situations. The military role is to contribute to a safe and secure environment to enable non-military work. Disarmament, demobilization and re-integration of the armed elements in the post-conflict countries are also crucial for maintaining peace and solidifying state institutions. A failure to build national security institutions eventually leads, in most cases, to the failure of the peacekeeping operations. This brings to the fore the importance of security sector reform and the leading role of the United Nations in supporting the national authorities engaged in such processes.

Effective transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding has always been a major challenge for the UN. The establishment of the Peace Building Commission (PBC) 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 to 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 "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 1.000.000 US Dollars to its Trust Fund.

As of August 2008 Turkey's ranking among the peacekeeper contributing countries is 26 with a total of 761 personnel. Turkey attaches particular importance to the civilian police component of the UN missions. Turkey is at the moment the tenth largest police contributor with 284 police officers serving in 10 different UN Missions. Turkey intends to further increase this contribution.

Combating Terrorism

Terrorism is a clear and present danger for the entire world. This scourge aims at the destruction of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy. It is a crime against humanity, regardless of source, pretext or ambition.

Terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, should be condemned unreservedly. Terrorists should be brought to justice; the obligation “extradite or prosecute” is of the utmost importance to this end.

The success of the struggle against terrorism depends on international cooperation and compliance with all the relevant international conventions as well as all UN General Assembly and Security Council Resolutions.

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. The first review meeting of the Strategy, held between 4 and 5 September 2008, enabled member states to assess the progress made in the implementation of the Strategy since its adoption. Turkey looks forward to the next meeting on the Strategy which is scheduled to take place during the 64th Session of the GA and calls upon all stakeholders to translate the provisions of the Strategy into practical action.

Turkey supported the Symposium on Supporting Victims of Terrorism, the first-ever United Nations event designed to give the victims of terrorism a voice. Turkey believes that the symposium has brought an important and human dimension to the discussions on terrorism within the UN and hopes that additional steps would be taken for the support of victims of terrorism.

Turkey welcomes the entry into force of International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. Turkey has signed the Convention and its ratification process is underway.

The conclusion of deliberations on the “Comprehensive Convention on International 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 requires the active engagement of the military and security forces, 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.

Disarmament and Non-Proliferation

The international security environment poses new challenges to disarmament and non-proliferation. Non-state actors, terrorists and states in non-compliance with their disarmament and non-proliferation 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 international community needs to build a strong consensus on measures to meet these challenges. Our ability to respond efficiently to the most pressing threats to international peace and security depends also heavily on how we make best use of multilateral fora, particularly the United Nations, which should be able to respond to those challenges and help to uphold the existing international disarmament regimes and, when necessary, enhance their effectiveness by appropriate means.

Located in a region of particular concern with respect to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Turkey closely monitors the developments in this field and takes part in collective efforts aimed at devising measures to reverse this alarming trend.

Turkey's security policy excludes the production and use of all kinds of WMD. We advocate global, overall disarmament and support all efforts in the field of sustaining international security through multilateral arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. Turkey is a party to all international non-proliferation instruments and export control regimes and wishes to see the universalisation, effective implementation and further strengthening of them.

Combating Illegal Migration

Development and aid are inseparably interlinked with the phenomenon of 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.

In dealing with illegal migration, the focus should be on opening channels for legal, regulated migration. A comprehensive approach should be adopted by bringing together a broad spectrum of policies, which have a direct and indirect effect on employment, development, integration, health, social matters, education, human rights, peace, justice, security and others. Closer ties between countries of origin, transit and destination would also be desirable.

Such measures should be coupled with efforts to ensure respect for migrants' rights and more attention should be paid to the problems facing legally residing migrants in foreign countries.

Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

The task of combating trafficking in human beings remains a challenge for the international community. This is the most serious form of human rights abuse and the re-emergence of slavery in this century.

The adoption in 2000 by the United Nations General Assembly of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking In Persons, Especially Women and Children marked a significant milestone in international efforts to stop this trade. Within the framework of the Protocol, United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime addresses these issues through its Global Programme against Trafficking in Human Beings. Many States have signed and ratified the Protocol. However, putting it into practice remains problematic. Every country has to have a strategy on combating this phenomenon. The problem should be dealt with by adopting a victim-oriented approach.

Combating Illegal Drug Trafficking

The fight against illicit trafficking of drugs can only be addressed by extensive cooperation, and exchange of information and expertise within the international community. As the UN constitutes an ideal platform for these endeavours, the Organization should further strengthen its efforts to provide assistance to the countries most affected by the 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, while developing and implementing effective reduction strategies.

As a leading country in the fight against the illegal drug trafficking, 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 combating this menace.

Human Rights

Today, the observance and promotion of contemporary standards in human rights, democracy and the rule of law has indeed become a fundamental criterion for the international community.

The protection and promotion of human rights has always been one of the main pillars of the UN system since its inception. No country is flawless in terms of human rights. The UN human rights system provides a forum for cooperation on a global scale to serve the common goals of setting and elevating standards, norms and principles relating to human rights to the benefit of all members of the international community.

Striving to achieve this ultimate aim requires a collective endeavour. It is for the benefit of all that cooperation reigns over confrontation in the UN human rights system.

Facilitating the work of civil society, eradicating torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, countering violence against women, eliminating all forms of intolerance and discrimination, advancing the rights of migrant workers and their families and addressing the issue of terrorism and human rights deserve particular attention.

For the past 60 years, the focus in the UN has been mainly on articulating and codifying fundamental rights and freedoms. With the advent of the new Human Rights Council (HRC), the cause of human rights in the UN system has entered a new era. It is essential that the HRC functions on dialogue and cooperation, rather than confrontation. The Council should also respond 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. The newly created “Universal Periodic Review” has so far proven to be a cooperative mechanism which also enables sharing of best practices and providing technical assistance and capacity building.

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-developing constitute complementary means to address gaps in the legal instruments of the UN human rights system. One of the major shortcoming is that existing legal instruments do not specifically cover multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination. Special attention needs to be given to the discrimination and intolerance on the grounds of religion with a view to avoiding new fault lines.

As we mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it should be recalled that respect for human rights is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. A whole network of human rights instruments and mechanisms has been developed over the 60 years.

As 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. It is important to target the widest possible consensus on human rights issues.

Environmental Issues and Climate Change

Environmental problems of the 21st century such as climate change, the depletion of the ozone layer, desertification, deforestation and the loss biological diversity are global in nature and have increasingly complex links to economic and social issues. Climate change, one of the greatest challenges that humanity faces, poses a major threat to the survival of humankind and to sustainable social and economic development. It is likely to aggravate significantly the existing problem of desertification, water scarcity and food production. Current environmental problems may also undermine progress in sustainable development, and in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The international community under the United Nations has made progress in environmental protection and management since 1972. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has been providing a solid ground for coordinated action within the United Nations system on the problems of environment. Major international agreements covering a wide range of environmental problems have been elaborated, adopted and implemented under UNEP's auspices. Developed and developing countries reviewed environmental policies at the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002 to reinvigorate global commitment to sustainable development. However, we are still lagging behind in sustainable development.

Our efforts should commit developed and developing countries to stronger actions on the basis of their respective capacities. All countries must carry out more intensive efforts to tackle environmental challenges, with the developed countries taking the lead in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. We have to align our countries' priorities with global action. We need to fully implement Agenda 21, the Rio principles and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation urgently.

Despite all of its accomplishments, the UN's environmental activities and the system of environmental governance need to be further strengthened. Coordination among the relevant UN agencies in the field of environment must be better defined. Caution must be taken not to duplicate the work of existing organizations.

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 to their full and active participation in every sphere of public life. Therefore, gender equality stands as a prerequisite for 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 parties. 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.

Gender issues constitute a prominent place in the agenda of the United Nations. The organizational structures of the UN should better reflect the importance we all attach to gender issue. The Secretary General's support for replacing several structures dealing with such issues with one dynamic UN entity merits recognition in this regard. Gender equality and women's empowerment need to be fully integrated, applied and adequately resourced in parallel with the efforts of the international community towards achieving sustainable development.

The Alliance of Civilizations

Spain and Turkey launched the Alliance of Civilizations initiative in an effort to stem the tide of intolerance, extremism and polarization between the Islamic world and the West. The aim of the initiative is to encourage greater cross-cultural understanding and to foster an atmosphere of mutual respect.

The school of thought that regards religions as distinct civilizations, with irreconcilable differences among them, refuses to acknowledge the rich diversity in human culture. This school also sustains offensive generalizations and misperceptions about peoples of other cultures or faiths, and seeks cultural uniformity by keeping out the “other”.

Turkey prefers to think in terms of one universal civilization based on fundamental values such as democracy, human rights and rule of law, and regional cultures co-existing under that global umbrella.

We are pleased that the Alliance of Civilizations initiative is already making a difference; the strong global interest in the initiative proves that the international community prefers an environment of cooperation rather than confrontation. The Alliance has made substantial progress in moving into the implementation stage and in strengthening its institutional structure.

The Group of Friends of the Alliance, formed within the United Nations, now includes 77 countries and 13 international organizations. The Group provides a useful platform for discussing strategic issues and channeling concrete support for the implementation process.

The First Alliance of Civilizations Forum was held in Madrid on 15-16 January 2008. The Forum brought together a high number of statesmen, political observers, diplomats, businessmen and journalists and initiated a useful exchange of views on the challenges facing the international community with respect to cross-cultural issues. Participants were able to map out the next stage of this process, on the basis of “National Strategies for cross-cultural dialogue”, to be prepared by members of the Group of Friends.

Turkey will host the Second Annual Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations to be held on 2-3 April 2009. We call on all countries and international organizations to support the initiative by participating in its implementation stage. As decades of misperception and disconnect cannot be redressed overnight, we are aware that this is a long process which can only be successful with the full contribution of the international community.

Cyprus

Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) maintain their vision that a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus issue should be found without further delay under the good-offices mission of the Secretary-General, and on the basis of the well-established UN parameters such as bi-zonality, political equality, equal status of the two Constituent States and a settlement which will bring about a new partnership state. The Turkish side has clearly demonstrated its resolve in this regard, and will continue to do so.

Following their initial meeting on 21 March 2008, TRNC President Talat and the newly elected Greek Cypriot leader Christofias met again on 23 May 2008, under the auspices of the UN Special Representative in Cyprus, and issued a Joint Statement.

This Joint Statement underlines that the new *“partnership will have a Federal Government with a single international personality, as well as a Turkish Cypriot Constituent State and a Greek Cypriot Constituent State, which will be of equal status”*. This is in line with the UN Settlement Plan and the underlying “virgin birth” concept, which will provide legal security and certainty for a solution. In their meeting which took place on 25th of July, the leaders concurred, inter alia, that the agreed solution will be put to separate simultaneous referenda.

The substantive negotiations to reach a comprehensive solution started between the two sides of the Island on 3 September 2008. The Turkish side believes that a solution is attainable even before the end of 2008. There is nothing new to be discovered, discussed or proposed about the Cyprus issue. There exists an immense “Body of Work” within the United Nations, one of the last elements of which is the UN Settlement Plan of 2004.

While wholeheartedly supporting the process Turkey expects that in the upcoming substantial negotiations the positive attitude of the Turkish Cypriot leadership is reciprocated. Therefore, it is Turkey’s expectation that the international community encourages the Greek Cypriot side to reach a comprehensive and just solution which will bring peace and stability not only to both peoples of the island but also to the region as a whole.

Turkey will actively pursue its endeavors to find a just and durable solution to the Cyprus issue and trusts that the UN Secretary General will accord high priority to this issue in the period ahead. As well, Turkey expects the international community to take action towards lifting the isolations on the Turkish Cypriot people.