

25 February 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the International Istanbul Conference on “Enhancing Peace
through Mediation: New Actors, Fresh Approaches, Bold Initiatives”**

Your Excellency Minister Davutoğlu,
Your Excellency Minister Tuomioja,
Your Excellency Minister Patriota,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you today.

I wish to thank the Turkish Government for organizing this important international conference, and for kindly inviting me to address such a distinguished group of participants as keynote speaker.

In recent years, Istanbul has become a center for mediation efforts. Turkey's efforts and focus range from the Arab-Israeli conflict to Afghanistan-Pakistan, from Iraq to Somalia-Eritrea.

Holding this conference in this historical and magnificent city is, therefore, particularly meaningful.

I commend Turkey for its decision to establish a Mediation Center in Istanbul, which will complement its on-going contribution to regional and international peace and security through mediation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased that the momentum created by the first-ever General Assembly resolution on mediation, adopted on 22 June 2011, continues today.

I was elected as the President of the General Assembly on the very same day that this resolution was adopted.

Before I assumed my current duties, within my capacity as Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UN, my team and I followed closely and contributed to this draft resolution. Because I sincerely believe in the vital role of mediation for resolving conflicts, and its relation to the concept of the Alliance of Civilizations.

Allow me to briefly touch on the developments in the United Nations since the adoption of this landmark resolution.

For the 66th session of the General Assembly, I have identified “The peaceful settlement of disputes” as one of my four priority areas. It is my intention to build on recent international momentum around mediation, and to carry it forward.

As you would recall, I suggested the theme “The role of mediation in the settlement of disputes” for the General Debate last September. I was humbled and encouraged by the strong support expressed by world leaders throughout the debate. Leaders shared their own experiences and approaches to mediation, and suggested some useful ideas.

Following the General Debate, I organized on 9 November 2011 an interactive meeting on “United Nations Mediation: Experiences and Reflections from the Field”. Former and current high level UN officials, who have led or taken part in mediation processes in different parts of the world, attended this meeting.

We were able to discuss thoroughly the role of the United Nations in mediation, and to collect UN-wide experiences from the prevention, peace-making and peacekeeping perspectives. I hope these discussions will contribute to the development of guidance for effective mediation that the Secretary-General is preparing. I have circulated a summary of the discussions to all Member States.

The Friends of Mediation organized another important meeting on 11 January 2012 in New York, on the role of the regional organizations.

This was a useful meeting where we heard directly from regional representatives about the challenges and solutions for mediation at regional level.

We have seen in recent conflicts and crises the significant and increasing role of regional and sub-regional arrangements. It is only natural that these organizations know and better understand the situation on the ground in their own regions.

The United Nations should, therefore, support regional actors and initiatives, with a view to finding lasting solutions to disputes.

It is a welcome and encouraging development that the United Nations, including the Security Council, is listening more closely to regional actors, and taking into consideration their concerns before making critical decisions.

I am pleased that the main focus of this two-day international conference is track II actors.

Track II actors - such as civil society organizations, research institutions, and former high level personalities - play a growing role in resolving conflicts, building capacities and engaging in post-conflict reconstruction.

In some cases, track II actors support and contribute to mediation processes. In others, they initiate, lead and successfully conclude entire processes.

As past experiences have taught us, every conflict or dispute is distinct. Each one requires careful attention and the most appropriate tools.

I would also assert that sometimes, track II players have a comparative advantage. They often act in a more informal and flexible way than State actors.

For this reason, the United Nations system, regional organizations and Member States should draw more from the expertise of this track. This conference is a good opportunity to explore how we can better benefit from each other's capacities and experiences, and how we can more effectively manage our knowledge and coordinate our efforts.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased at this juncture to announce that on 23 May 2012, I will convene an informal high-level meeting of the General Assembly in New York, with a focus on the role of Member States in mediation.

Recent years have witnessed the emergence of Member States that are actively and boldly engaged in mediation efforts around the world, working hard to settle disputes and resolve conflicts.

The May event will complement the meetings organized thus far.

I intend to invite prominent international mediators and high-level officials from active Member States. This will provide a platform for an in-depth and comprehensive discussion. Benefiting from the experience of eminent mediators, the meeting will seek to identify challenges to effectively dealing with regional and international conflicts.

It will also explore possible means and tools that would help better address these challenges.

This high-level meeting will be followed by, and will feed into, the Secretary-General's report and the guidance for more effective mediation, which were mandated by the General Assembly resolution adopted last year.

I consider mediation and cross-cultural dialogue as two issues that are closely interlinked.

I am willing to build on this concept in the near future.

In some cases, we have to depend on the involvement of local religious leaders, elders or women organizations to end violence among groups of different faiths or ethnic groups. These actors have significant leverage and authority in local communities.

Actually, they are the local track II actors.

In this context, I will convene a one-day thematic debate on 22 March 2012 at the United Nations in New York, to explore how to foster cross-cultural understanding for building peaceful and inclusive societies.

The debate will be organized in partnership with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, which has undertaken tremendous work since its establishment, in spite of its scarce resources.

One of the questions that we will try to answer at this meeting is:

How can mediation reduce tensions and advance the search for peace in a world of diversity and competing aspirations?

I would like to invite participants here today to join us for this meeting next month in New York.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our world is going through a challenging period. It is indeed a period of marked transition: all eyes are on the awakening taking place across the Arab world and other places. This flow of history cannot be stopped nor reversed.

Tragically, many people have paid the ultimate price for the establishment of an accountable political system that respects the dignity and basic rights of its people.

Libya is a case in point. I visited Libya in November, and saw first-hand the destruction inflicted on children, women, the society in general and the overall infrastructure.

In order to ensure a peaceful and smooth transition, there were multiple mediation efforts in Libya.

None of the proposals or road maps were accepted by the then leadership in Tripoli.

Libya, Syria and other similar cases have shown very clearly the importance of mediation at earlier stages of the conflicts, to save lives, protect civilians and maintain stability.

There are lessons to be learned, particularly by those who insist on clinging to power against the will of their own people. We should allow more room for mediation before conflicts erupt or situations worsen.

Before concluding, let me again express my appreciation to the Government of Turkey for bringing together such a renowned group of track II actors.

I wish you a successful and fruitful conference.

Together with my team, I stand ready to follow-up the conclusions of this conference, particularly in the light of the preparations for the informal high-level meeting of the General Assembly on 23 May in New York.

Thank you.