

5 July 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Moroccan Academy for Diplomatic Studies**

Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am greatly honoured to have accepted your kind invitation to visit the Kingdom of Morocco, and to stand before you today in the ancient city of Rabat.

Over the past two days, I have been involved in important discussions with officials in your great country. Yesterday, I met His Excellency the Head of the Government and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. Today I met the President of the Council of Representatives and the President of the Chamber of Councilors. I also visited important landmarks and institutions that bear witness to the long history of culture in this country. I was also pleased to meet the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, who is organizing this session.

I am very happy to be here today, in this country of history, the present and the future.

I say "country of history": your leaders, including His Majesty Mohammed V and His Majesty Hassan II, have led your country towards civilization and liberation.

Your learned persons have included Ibn al-Banna', the engineer and mathematician who flourished in Fez and Marrakesh, and whose learning was well-known in Europe. Your ancient culture has spread throughout the world. The world celebrates your architecture and covets your heritage!

Perhaps you will agree with me that the winds of the Mediterranean are full of stories about the legendary epics of the Moroccan heroes up to the time when the country was liberated from colonialism in the 1950s. Morocco joined the United Nations family in 1956 and is nowadays one of the most active and important members of that family, by virtue of its multiple commitments and its unique geographical position as the bridge for development and cooperation across the Mediterranean, between the countries of the North and the South.

Morocco is indeed a country of remarkable history: I have been keenly aware here of the variety of cultures and the accumulation on this land over thousands of years of epochs and kingdoms, where cultures, learning and a rich heritage have flourished.

I hope you will allow me to speak as an Arab and say that I am proud of you and I am unabashedly proud of the achievements and cultures of our peoples; our achievements in philosophy, science, medicine, the arts and all other aspects of civilization.

Nevertheless, I must be frank. Today, the Arab world is not a motivating force in the spheres of the sciences, technology, the arts, music, literature and other areas of creativity. This has been clear in successive United Nations Human Development Reports. The Arab world must confront this truth and address it.

It is possible that the Arab Spring was the beginning of a return to that glory, and will revive and reinvigorate this region. In this respect, Morocco offers such a wonderful model, with your tireless efforts to achieve reformation and modernization.

I also said that this is a country that has a present, and commend the bold process of reform you are undertaking, which should be taken as an example to be followed.

There is no better indication of the success of your choice to reform and promote democracy than the painful events that have taken place in the Arab Spring countries, in the search for freedom and peace, democracy and human rights, and for a life of dignity rather than of fear and deprivation.

I said that this is a country that has a future: the institution in which we stand today, the Moroccan Academy for Diplomatic Studies, illustrates a wise leadership that believes in human development and the cultivation of future generations. It is open to the world, for the sake of a better tomorrow.

I said that this is a country that has both a present and a future: Morocco is not just a member of the League of Arab States and the Arab Maghreb Union. It also plays a leading role in the Group of 77 and China, the Movement of Non-Aligned States, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. It is also an effective member of the United Nations, and is been responsible, as a current member of the Security Council, for important initiatives in the areas of development, peacekeeping and international security.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The role that any effective State plays in the world is closely linked with its own interests and challenges. The planet on which we are living is under strain and facing numerous social, environmental, economic and other challenges, including human rights and security and stability.

I am sure that you are preoccupied by the question of how we can respond effectively to the challenges of the twenty-first century, knowing, as we do, that the Middle East and North Africa are living through a period of rapid change.

One recourse is to consider the principles of collective responsibility, mutual interests and shared challenges. But where can we find the necessary meeting place in this complex world? I think it is the United Nations, the international organization with the most legitimacy, that is the most appropriate arena in which your concerns may be addressed.

The United Nations is indeed the most important organization in the world. No other organization has such a global and varied character as the United Nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the United Nations we say that no one model fits all. That said, the United Nations is nonetheless the indispensable territory on which we must anchor the values of human rights, freedom, justice, equality and freedom of expression. Those freedoms underpin our culture and values.

The Charter of the United Nations, which was formulated after the tragedy of the second world war, is an attempt to bring States closer together than at any time in the past, within the family of the United Nations.

Can the States of the Middle East and North African region benefit from the United Nations in achieving development? I think this achievement is possible today, with the dawn of democracy. It is possible, with the possibilities we have before us. Socrates said, long ago, that anyone who has the right idea will get inspiration and anyone who keeps on trying will succeed.

The bases of democracy, openness, transparency, the rule of law, and universal values will give the region opportunities to keep abreast of the movement of history, to be part of the global village and the modern world, and to contribute to the advancement of the world, not only by supplying it with resources, but also by supplying it with universally-recognized intellectual products. Then, if the region really believes in global values, it will again be able to rise.

The region will rise again when it enjoys freedom of thought, freedom of expression, academic freedoms, a free media, freedom of religion, freedom of conscience; complete sexual equality; equality of opportunity; when rights are respected by all constitutions and Government institutions and adopted as a culture by civil society.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The United Nations General Assembly, of which I have the honour to be the current President, is not just the most obvious embodiment of the concept of the universal family, but it is an all-encompassing meeting place that brings together all the Member States of the United Nations, of which there are currently 193. The Assembly also includes representatives from all the international institutions. Accordingly, it does not have an easy task, when there are 193 members with a variety of interests. That means 193 Governments! That means 193 national economies!

Consequently, I have endeavoured to focus the energies of the General Assembly, which is the source of all international law, on dealing with the main challenges on which all States Members agree. I selected four pillars that help focus the Assembly's work in dealing with challenges both during and after my Presidency:

Firstly, the role of mediation in the settlement of disputes. Why this topic?

Because conflicts throughout the world have become more serious than ever before. The Charter of the United Nations, Chapter VI, sets forth the principle of the pacific settlement of international disputes by negotiation and mediation. The focus of the preamble to the Charter is on peaceful relations between States. Nevertheless, to date no mechanism has been devised to that end. By selecting this theme as my first area of focus, I hoped that it would be built upon and completed in the future, in order to benefit the whole of mankind.

Just look at the Arab-Israeli conflict and at what could be achieved if the Palestinians and Israelis were to live together in an equitable peace.

We were witnesses to a historic moment in September 2011, when President Mahmoud Abbas announced that he had asked the Secretary-General to admit Palestine as a full member of the United Nations. I received an identical request in my capacity as President of the General Assembly, and immediately circulated it to all States Members. We are all aware that the passage of that request has been blocked in the Security Council, for political rather than technical or legal considerations.

Nevertheless, if the Palestinians put this matter to the General Assembly, that body will, with support from peace-loving countries, be prepared to assist in gradually raising the level of representation of Palestine at the United Nations. The Middle East must eventually become free of occupation and of nuclear weapons, and be secure from wars and the evils of conflict.

The suffering of the Syrian people must end.

It is possible to imagine that what happened in Rwanda and Bosnia could be repeated in many parts of the world. Accordingly, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations at the global level is extremely important, and can help to resolve differences between States with widely disparate cultures. It can be used to strengthen dialogue, rapprochement and development, which will, in turn, help to strengthen coexistence and thus forge international peace and security.

Here, I should like to proudly mention the leading role that my country, Qatar, has played in supporting the Alliance and its strategic aims. I have taken upon myself to practice and promote the Alliance's mission as part of my work in the United Nations, including as the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations.

It is therefore no wonder that the issue of the Alliance of Civilizations and its relationship to mediation in the settlement of disputes should be the first of my priorities while President of the General Assembly, and thereafter.

The Alliance of Civilizations is one of the most innovative endeavours of the international community, aiming to provide the world with a framework for mending our differences and building common ground for a human family that is more tolerant and peaceful at a time of historical change. That

Alliance proved its effectiveness when tensions rose after 2001 and has proved to be a new path to peace for the United Nations to follow.

This method can be applied not only to conventional conflicts, but also to multi-faceted confrontations and tense relationships that include, for example, Iran and the West and the nuclear issue, as well as other matters. The security and stability of the Gulf region are central to the security and stability of the whole world.

Secondly, Sustainable Development and Global Prosperity. Do you know why I chose to focus on this theme? We say in the United Nations that security, peace and development are interlinked factors that impact each other. We also say that the Millennium Development Goals must be achieved by 2015. The Earth Summit was held last month in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It was not possible to ignore those important factors, which is why I chose to focus on this theme.

In accordance with the powers granted to me in the final communiqué of the Earth Summit, I am currently working towards establishing a mechanism within the General Assembly that will define the new development goals for 2015 and beyond, to be known as the Sustainable Development Goals. I will form a team of Member States to undertake that task, in accordance with the usual system of geographical distribution. I am very happy to be undertaking this historic duty.

My third priority area is Improving Disaster Prevention and Response. Disasters may be either man-made or natural, and do not differentiate between developing or developed countries. Experience has shown beyond all doubt that natural disasters can strike mercilessly on the most highly developed States, on fertile and barren areas, on rich and poor, and great and small.

My fourth priority area is United Nations Reform and Revitalization. Such reform is unavoidable, and includes strengthening the General Assembly and reforming the Security Council.

The General Assembly must be strong and responsive to the challenges of the modern age.

The Security Council must be able to respond at the right time to emergencies that threaten global peace and security.

Humanity must be generous of spirit, and leadership must be capable of making decisions.

Given these significant tasks, I selected my team very carefully. It includes Qatari diplomats who were my students and others, from Member States, who represent a variety of cultures and ideas, in the spirit of the United Nations itself. I will not be satisfied by making statements and adopting an objective approach to strengthening the General Assembly: I have already begun to allow it to play the role it deserves. The General Assembly has assumed the lead in dealing with the matter of Syria, which was not easy.

Together with the Secretary-General, with whom I have a close relationship, I carried out field visits to Libya and Somalia in order to provide those countries with the necessary United Nations support.

During the past 10 months of my Presidency of the General Assembly, with the support of Members States, and within the framework of the four priority areas I outlined above, I have held a series of conferences on mediation and the settlement of disputes, the state of the world economy, the road to the Rio conference and beyond, dealing with disasters, and United Nations reform and revitalization. Growing consensus at these conferences was palpable and I have disseminated their outcomes to all Member States. I invite you to read about them on the United Nations webpage.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The international community must confront the current sense of insecurity and the rapid global changes. It must continue to be prepared to provide mankind with support.

Taking into account the fact that the challenges of transiting to freedom and democracy are not straightforward, the General Assembly is ready to confront those challenges, provide the necessary expertise and marshal global efforts to meet the aspirations of peoples for development.

Before I conclude, I should like to recall the words of the philosopher Kant: live and let live!

In my capacity as President of the 66th session of the United Nations General Assembly, I am bound to carry out my duty to serve mankind to the best of my abilities to the very last day of my term of office.

Thank you.