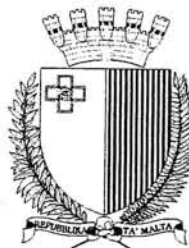


MALTA



STATEMENT BY

**THE HON. DR. LAWRENCE GONZI
PRIME MINISTER**

GENERAL DEBATE

**SIXTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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Mr. President
Mr. Secretary-General
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your unanimous election to preside over this Sixty-fourth Session of the U.N. General Assembly. Your election is a deserved tribute to your own personal qualities as a seasoned politician and diplomat and also to your country Libya with which Malta has a long-standing bond of friendship and cooperation. I am sure that your wise leadership and experience will guide this august Assembly throughout your term to a successful and fruitful outcome.

My delegation's thanks and appreciation are extended to your distinguished predecessor, H.E. Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann for the dedicated manner he has presided over the work and activities of the Sixty-third Session.

Mr. President,

Malta would like to take this opportunity to salute and thank the U.N. Secretary General for his unstinting efforts in guiding our Organization in the maintenance of international peace and stability worldwide. Under his leadership the U.N. has made important strides in raising awareness and in many instances to respond effectively to the critical situation of the poor and more vulnerable.

It is therefore of great satisfaction to my Government and that of the Maltese People for having had the honour and privilege to welcome you in Malta last April.

Mr. President,

This year Malta is marking three important anniversaries. The first is the Forty-fifth Anniversary of Malta's Independence on 21 September 1964, the second is the Fifteenth Anniversary of the entry into force of the U.N. Framework Convention in Climate Change on 21 March 1994 and the third the Fifteenth Anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on 16 November 1994.

Over the last 45 years, Malta has made good on its pledge made when it joined this Organization. In this regard, I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to renew today, on this 45th Anniversary of Malta's U.N. membership, our pledge and our unwavering faith and thrust in the ideals and purposes enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

One of the issues which in the coming weeks will be on top of the international agenda is the Copenhagen Summit. Two days ago, this Assembly Hall witnessed one of the largest ever gathering of Heads of State and Heads of Government to debate the future of our planet Earth. During this unique Summit we all agreed that the challenges posed by climate change have become the most urgent and critical faced by humankind.

It will be recalled that when in 1988, Malta took the initiative to formally table the issue of climate change as a political item on the agenda of the Forty-Third Session of the UN General Assembly, few would have thought at that time that this issue of climate change would become in the span of two decades one of the principal critical issues dominating the international environmental concerns of this new century. Malta has throughout these twenty years been in the forefront to ensure that climate change continues to become one of the top priority issues of our times. Malta's commitment of 20 years ago remains steadfast and as strong as ever.

As we have heard during the past few days the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit must signal a turning point. Malta strongly believes that it is the duty of all countries, large and small, rich and poor, to contribute their fair share in this concerted effort which must be global if it is to succeed.

On 16 November of this year, Member states will be commemorating the 15th Anniversary of the entry into force of the U.N. Convention in the Law of the Sea which has been described as the Constitution for regulating humankind's activities of the Oceans. It was forty-two years ago that in this Assembly Hall Malta had called on UN Member States to undertake a reform of the Law of the Sea which culminated in the adoption of the Convention on 10 December 1982. It is also necessary to see the 1982 convention in the light of some pressing contemporary problems which are either addressed inadequately, or not addressed at all.

Among these deficiencies are the provisions dealing with piracy, illicit traffic in narcotic drugs or psychotropic substance, the rules relating to the protection and preservation of the marine environment, and the rules dealing with submarine cables and pipelines. Examples of omissions are the trafficking of human beings, the safety and security of navigation, the transportation of weapons of mass destruction, and climate change.

In the light of issues I have just mentioned, Malta feels that the time has come for the U.N. General Assembly to examine possible approaches to a review of the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention. In this context, Malta would like to propose that the UN General Assembly, through its relevant bodies, undertakes appropriate consultations among its Member States to revise the Convention in the view of the passage of time and the emergence of new and critical issues over the years. My delegation will be ready to enter into consultations with other interested Member States to advance further this proposal.

Mr. President,

Just as it was necessary in 1948 to recognize the need for a universal declaration of human rights, as a fundamental condition for the enjoyment of freedom, justice and peace for all men and women around the world, so it has become vital now to have a concomitant declaration on human duties of the present generation as well as our responsibilities towards future generations.

We have the overall task of conserving the human species in the sacredness of its life and in its continuity, as well as of preserving the environment, in all its manifestations. We believe that such a declaration emanates naturally from that doctrine of the common heritage of mankind which my country, in 1967, first mooted to this Assembly, eventually leading to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Malta believes that human duties are intrinsic to the personality, oneness and uniqueness of the human being, and are as inalienable as human rights. Those duties do not arise from laws or obligations but are fundamentally inherent to the human being. Such duties refer to the human beings themselves and to their fellow beings, and in a special manner to their family, to the community at all levels, and to the natural and cultural environment in which their life evolves.

The envisaged declaration, strengthening and fulfilling the thrust of the 1948 universal instrument, should mark the work of this Assembly as a consummate service to the international community. It should stand out as a major achievement of the United Nations at the beginning of the third millennium of our era.

It is in this spirit that Malta is accordingly proposing that consideration be given for the drafting of such a declaration on human duties and responsibilities.

Mr. President,

Conflicts around the world have continued to affect the political, economic and social development of many countries and a large part of our societies. It is tragic that in the last

decade more than 2 million innocent children were killed and 6 million seriously injured in conflicts. The role of the United Nations in preventive diplomacy and support to peace processes must enjoy a strong political and sustainable backing of UN Member States.

A number of hotspots in Somalia, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo and the Middle East continue to challenge our collective search for peaceful and long-lasting solutions to these war torn countries and regions. Malta therefore welcomes our Organization's engagement through its peacekeeping missions and peace-building mechanisms to bring political dialogue and reconciliation among the warring parties. We believe that by assisting countries emerging from conflict in the rebuilding of the lives of their populations would contribute in no small way in providing the necessary support to nationally driven efforts in the achievement of sustainable peace and development.

One of the long-standing issues which the United Nations has been seized with since its inception is the question of the Middle East. Indeed, peace in the Middle East continues to evade our long sought efforts. Malta reiterates the need of having two states, Palestine and Israel, both living in secure and guaranteed frontiers in recognition of each others sovereignty and the right to peaceful co-existence. This is not a view which we have adopted today. It is a vision that has been ours for decades, believing as we do that peace in the Middle East determines peace in the Mediterranean as well as the understanding of the Arab world.

Malta's geo-strategic location in the Mediterranean has placed it in the privileged yet responsible position of building bridges between the two continents. In fact, Malta's vocation towards peace and security in the Mediterranean continues to occupy an important place of my Government's foreign policy priorities. During the past twelve months Malta has continued to build on the achievements made so far by enhancing the dialogue between countries in the Mediterranean region and the European Union and also with the League of Arab States.

It is with a strong sense of political commitment and direction that we bear the responsibility of hosting in Malta a European Union and League of Arab States Liaison Office, which is due to be opened this coming October. Malta believes that the special place that the Liaison Office will occupy in the development of this cooperation will render a major contribution to this end. In responding to the principles of international ethics and legality, the Malta initiative will continue building a farther reaching support to inter-cultural interlocutors in their endeavours to convey the right signals and messages.

Mr. President,

It will be recalled that last year I had raised the issue of the influx of illegal immigrants who risk their lives in crossing the Mediterranean to seek a new beginning. I had indicated that the small size of Malta, our financial and human resources make it extremely difficult to cope with such a huge number of these unfortunate people to be accommodated in Malta.

Notwithstanding the severe difficulties faced by Malta, we continue to honour our international obligations vis-à-vis genuine refugees and persons qualifying for humanitarian protection. Malta has featured as one of the countries, in proportion to its size and population, with the highest number of awards to asylum seekers. For years, we have insisted on measures of international solidarity, beginning with effective action at the European Union level. Malta is also a candidate to host the European Asylum Support Office, and believes it can offer optimal conditions for the functioning of the Office. Through this Office Malta intends to contribute to the coordination and supporting common action to assist EU Member States under particular pressure, in particular pressure arising from their geographical or demographic situations or situations characterised by sudden arrivals of large numbers of third-country nationals who may be in need of international protection.

Malta has always dealt with these situations with great responsibility, humanity and benevolence paying due respect to every human being without exception and we will continue to do so. At the same time, the problem of illegal immigration is an international phenomenon driven by external factors which cannot always be prevented or even mitigated by the countries affected by this problem. We therefore feel that the United Nations should address the issue of illegal immigration in a holistic way so as to find solutions to a humanitarian problem that countries like Malta and other Mediterranean countries are facing in an unprecedented manner. More needs to be done and all of us, including those countries of origin and transit, need to step up our efforts in order to deal with this challenge. Here I would like to reiterate my Government's deep appreciation to those countries which have come forward to assist us in coping with this phenomenon, including France and the United States of America. My Government also hopes that other countries would come forward to assist in alleviating the burden which Malta carries – a burden so acutely disproportionate to the Malta's population, land area and population density.

Mr. President,

In his report on the work of the Organization, the Secretary-General has laid emphasis on the need to embark on a multilateral effort of immense magnitude "that draws upon the strengths and contributions of all the countries of the world, as well as their citizens." Malta believes that such an effort must find its foundations in this Organization where all its Member States are equal and where the many challenges facing humankind can be addressed in a cohesive and coherent manner.

The global challenges which the United Nations faces are our challenges.

We, as Member States, have an obligation and the responsibility to ensure that our Organisation lives up to the commitments and decisions which we as Heads of States and Heads of Governments solemnly undertake to implement in the best interest of our constituencies and societies.

Malta continues to strongly believe that together, as Members of the United Nations, we can and we should continue to support the United Nations, our Secretary-General and all those that are contributing to make our world a better one for present and future generations. Malta intends to do so.

Thank you.