

12 April 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,  
President of the 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Closing High-level Session of the Second Istanbul Conference  
on Mediation**

Respected Ministers Davutoğlu and Tuomioja,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, let me express my sincere appreciation to the Group of Friends of Mediation particularly its co-chairs Finland and Turkey for their strong commitment to this important instrument of soft-power diplomacy.

It is wonderful to be back in Istanbul a place of shared and intertwined history of dozens of peoples, including my own.

This is one of the globe's most majestic urban melting pots, whose inhabitants foster a truly unique atmosphere which makes most visitors feel like at home. It is a capital of culture and commerce as much as of peace and mediation living proof of how various civilizations may harmoniously blend, as our world pivots towards greater empowerment of both citizens and nations.

Ahmet, my Dear Friend,

I sincerely thank you for your kind invitation and exceptional hospitality.

I can attest from first-hand experience that Foreign Minister Davutoğlu is an exceptional mediator, a man of great erudition and incessant energy. His negotiation style embodies the principle of *audiatur et altera pars* a Latin phrase, first attributed to the philosopher Seneca, that means "hear the other side."

An effective mediator should aspire to facilitate communication between those who are at variance, fully understanding the respective challenges they face, while conceiving potential solutions. He helps them arrive at a voluntary agreement, aiming not only to bridge immediate divides, but also to restore trust and reconcile those who are at odds.

By its very nature, mediation thus looks to the future, seeking to put an end to enmity.

If practiced appropriately, it greatly advances the purposes and principles of the United Nations. Our Charter states that parties to any dispute which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, should first of all seek a solution by, *inter alia*, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and judicial settlement.

Mediation can thus help bring about the adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means which is the overarching theme I have chosen for the 67th Session of the General Assembly.

In September last year, at the beginning of my tenure as President of the General Assembly, I was privileged to participate in the High-level launch of the United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation.

I believe there is a potential for the UN's 'chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ' to play a singular role in bringing mediation efforts to a successful conclusion. When a settlement is reached anywhere in the world through this or any other soft-power instrument deriving from the Charter the General Assembly, coming together in consensus, could act as a moral guarantor of what has been agreed.

Such an approach would surely confer indispensable legitimacy on any peace agreement, to the benefit of the stakeholders, and all of mankind.

Excellencies,

Allow me to share with you a brief summary of how the 67th Session of the General Assembly has acted with regard to the specific cases that have been discussed during this Conference.

Last November, the plenary adopted by consensus a resolution entitled "The Situation in Afghanistan." Affirming the continued support for the country's peace, reconciliation and development processes, it is one of the most comprehensive and detailed documents of its kind ever approved by Member States.

The 22-page document endorses plans to complete the security transition by the end of 2014, at which time a "transformation decade" for that country would follow, "in which Afghanistan consolidates its sovereignty through strengthening a fully functioning, sustainable State in the service of its people."

Implementing this resolution will almost certainly require the services of good-faith mediators for years to come.

Excellencies,

In mid-February of this year, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on Syria entitled the "Situation of Human Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic." It strongly condemned "widespread and systematic gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms." It also stressed support for a "peaceful, democratic and pluralistic society" in Syria, and demanded that the Commission of Inquiry be provided with unfettered access to all areas of the country.

Two weeks after its passage in the plenary, I addressed both the Human Rights Council and the Fifth Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, and extended a strong appeal to bring the fighting to an immediate end.

Today, I would like to call for an immediate cessation of hostilities once again.

The perpetuation of the bloodbath in Syria has become the most horrific humanitarian tragedy of our times. It is unconscionable that for more than two years, the international community has failed to put a stop to the carnage. Bringing it to an end must be our foremost priority. This has to be followed by a political process that would enable Syrians to freely determine the course of their lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is a manifest danger that the violence will be allowed to run its course, with tragic consequences for the civilian population. It is incumbent on us to rally around efforts by those who may enjoy the confidence of the parties, mediating an outcome that brings the wanton death and destruction to an end.

Excellencies,

Another Middle Eastern issue which has drawn the attention of this Conference is the Israeli-Palestinian question. On the 65th anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 181, which called for a Two State solution, I was greatly privileged to preside over a historic session of the General Assembly in which Member States overwhelmingly voted to grant Palestine Non-member Observer State Status to the United Nations.

During the debate in the plenary, it was clearly underscored that this development was no substitute for the achievement of a just and comprehensive settlement that will enable Israel and Palestine to live side by side in peace and security.

One can only hope that the stage will soon be set for the negotiations to resume in good faith. Here too, the work of honest brokers and mediators will play a crucial role in moving the peace process forward.

Excellencies,

African issues continue to draw significant attention of the General Assembly. I strongly believe that bridging the gap between the promise of the Continent and the reality on the ground in many of its parts should be a strategic task for the entire United Nations system.

In my view, the UN should play a more active role in supporting the initiatives and programs of African-owned and African-led processes. Their concerns should be our concerns, from fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals and setting the right parameters for the post-2015 agenda, to the establishment of enduring peace and security.

This Conference focused on the Horn of Africa. However, other parts of the Continent also require our persistent consideration, including the Sahel and the Great Lakes. Each of these will be discussed in the General Assembly as part of the thematic debate on the “Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts in Africa,” that I called for April 25th, in observance of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity the precursor to the African Union.

The occasion will provide the Member States with an opportunity to reflect on the remarkable journey the continent has made over the past five decades. It will also enable us to take stock of various efforts including mediation to address current challenges, and point at ways in which the UN can further strengthen its cooperation with African countries and their regional organizations in the period before us.

Excellencies,

The Group of Friends of Mediation and the “Mediation for Peace” initiative that was established by Turkey and Finland in September 2010 have helped set the groundwork for an enhanced use of this soft-power tool in both peaceful resolution and prevention of disputes.

As President of the General Assembly, I will continue to support them, and help promote the Guidance for Effective Mediation.

The nobility of a neutral figure standing between opposing persons or communities as a reconciler or peacemaker permeates ethnical, cultural and religious traditions across the globe.

In the Qu’ran, it is written that a mediator “stands out firmly for justice, as a witness to Allah, even as against himself or his parents, or his relatives, and whether it be [against] rich or poor.” The Bible reminds us that a “mediator is not for one [side],” but is instead someone capable of “lay[ing] his hands upon [them] both.”

These sacred words direct us to the essential virtues of a true mediator: to be an equal friend to each party, acting impartially in the name of achieving a just result, irrespective of preference or interest, and so help provide for a new beginning between those torn asunder by the misfortune and vicissitudes of discord.

Thank you very much for your attention.