



Statement by
H. E. Mr. Walid Al-Moualem
Minister for Foreign Affairs

Of
The Syrian Arab Republic

At
The General Debate

Of the
63rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

New York
September 27th 2008

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Your Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockman
President of the Sixty Third Session of the General Assembly
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to congratulate you and your friendly country Nicaragua on your election to the presidency of this session. I wish you success in your mission, and express our satisfaction with the message of your introductory remarks at the opening of the General Debate. I would also like to thank your predecessor Dr. Sirgjam Kirim for successfully steering the work of the previous session. I extend to the Secretary General of the United Nations our best wishes for success in the realization of the purposes and objectives of the Charter of our international organization.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Middle East region is one of the most volatile regions of the world which continues to face mounting challenges. Daunting as these challenges may be, they must not deter us from looking forward to see the light at the end of the tunnel and from seeking better circumstances. Syria is an essential part of the solutions which the peoples of the region seek, given its geographic location and the aspirations of its people. For this reason, President Bashar Al-Assad took the initiative to call for the Damascus quartet summit attended by President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, the Emir of the State of Qatar Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan. All these states have a stake in the safety and stability of the Middle East region. Each and every one of them has made constructive contributions despite differing perspectives and positions. The four leaders probed the issue of stability and peace in the Middle East and stressed the need for consultations, coordination and persistence in pursuit of these objectives. They recognized that stasis, the suffering resulting from the Israeli occupation of Arab territories that has continued since 1967 and the disregard for the Palestinian people's rights throw the region into a state of despair. Under these circumstances, attaining a just and comprehensive peace becomes untenable, and the region becomes a fertile ground for anger and turmoil. In the final analysis, this situation does not serve the interests of the world or that of the countries of the region.

By calling for convening this quartet summit, Syria stressed that the just and comprehensive peace is its strategic choice and that it is striving to attain it in cooperation with regional and international partners who share Syria's vision. The realization of peace requires from all those who have a direct stake in the matter, or

those who have the power or who can influence the outcomes to evince the necessary political will. Years after the will to make peace lost its priority status in policies that do influence the situation in the region we were asked to go to Annapolis. We all went to Annapolis, despite the ambiguity of the whole undertaking. The question that begs an answer now is "what did Annapolis achieve?" Where exactly do we stand? Have the Annapolis promises to establish the Palestinian state before the end of the current year been fulfilled? Has Israel stopped building settlements in the occupied Arab territories?

Despite the above, and given that the withdrawal of Israel from our occupied Golan to the line of June 4 1967 and that making peace are Syrian national priorities, we entered into indirect negotiations with Israel, with the commendable mediation of Turkey. As President Bashar Al-Assad said, we wanted the negotiations to establish the grounds and pave the way for direct negotiations that would ultimately be sponsored by several international parties. This however requires a genuine Israeli will capable of accommodating the exigencies of peace-making. It also requires the will to include peace in the Middle East on the American list of priorities after years of deliberately ignoring and failing to acknowledge it in such a way that has exacerbated the situation in the region.

Syria stresses once again its ardent and consistent support for the Palestinian people's rights to recover their occupied land and establish their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. Syria underlines the need to restore the Palestinian national unity through national dialogue, and is working towards that end in its capacity as the current Chairman of the Arab Summit.

Mr. President,

The Iraqi situation is a matter of prime concern to us in Syria because Iraq is an Arab fraternal country and because, as a neighboring country, we are affected by the negative and positive developments therein. We have always stressed the need to preserve the unity of the people of Iraq, its territorial integrity, the non- interference in its internal affairs and the need to preserve its sovereignty, independence , its Arab and Islamic character, and to oppose the calls to divide it. We repeatedly declared that the solution in Iraq begins with national reconciliation built on the principle of respect for the will of the Iraqi people of all stripes. We reiterated the need for the withdrawal of foreign troops in agreement with the Iraqi government. We have condemned and continue to condemn all the terrorist acts that have a high toll among innocent civilians in Iraq. We believe that the stability that Iraq longs for requires an Iraqi consensus to overcome the obstacles barring its realization.

It is regrettable that the abnormal circumstances that prevailed in Iraq as a result of the American invasion in 2003 have prompted many Iraqis to leave their country in pursuit of safety and security. Syria hosts a great number of Iraqi brothers. We are aware of the humanitarian crisis inflicted upon the Iraqis who were forced out of their country as a result of the deterioration of the situation in their country, and hope that the improvement of the security situation will permit all Iraqis to return to Iraq.

Mr. President,

We in Syria are satisfied because the situation in Lebanon is in the process of being resolved after the conclusion of the Doha Agreement that enabled the Lebanese to elect a consensual president, establish a government of national unity and initiate national dialogue. Despite unfounded claims to the contrary, we have and continue to support all what it takes to assist the Lebanese to arrive at consensual solutions built on dialogue and on an affirmation of national unity. During the recent visit of the Lebanese President Michel Sleiman to Syria, we declared that we jointly decided to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries with a view to maintaining our relations and in support of the common, deep and wide-ranging interests between our two fraternal peoples. We also agreed to resume the work of the Joint Lebanese-Syrian border demarcation commission in accordance with mechanisms and priorities to be agreed upon by the two parties. The two countries also agreed to entrust their respective authorities to continue to work together to control their common borders, fight smuggling , undertake the necessary measures to promote trade, create the conditions for economic integration and establish a common economic market.

Mr. President,

Syria supports the efforts aimed at guaranteeing Sudan's unity and territorial integrity and promoting peace and stability therein. In this context, we are totally opposed to the decision by the Prosecutor General of the International Criminal Court and call on the Security Council to suspend it with a view to creating the favorable conditions for pursuing the initiative endorsed by the Arab League Council of ministers on August 9 2008. The Initiative called for the establishment of an Arab ministerial committee under the chairmanship of Qatar and entrusting it with overseeing comprehensive peace talks between the Government of Sudan and the armed groups in Darfur. The committee will be co-sponsoring these negotiations in cooperation and coordination with the international mediator of the African Union and the UN representative. It will also seek to improve the humanitarian situation and promote development in Darfur. Syria which is a member in this committee calls on all the states concerned and on the international community to support the

committee in its efforts to allow it to undertake the mandate with which it was entrusted. In this context, Syria welcomes the normalization of the Sudanese-Chadian relations and believes that it is a positive contribution to the solution of the Darfur question.

Mr. President,

The Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons guaranteed the right of all states in possessing nuclear technologies for peaceful purposes. Much was said about the Iranian nuclear issue, with some advocating a diplomatic solution and others promoting the use of force. Meanwhile, Iran has time and again stressed that it is solely dedicated to the peaceful uses of nuclear power. Deep mistrust between Iran and its interlocutors complicates matters and prevents stakeholders from reaching an understanding. This is what we are trying to do. We are seeking to arrive at a political understanding of the Iranian nuclear issue. Any other option shall not be in the interest of anyone and shall inflict catastrophic losses on the region and the world.

In this context, and in line with our principled position, we call for declaring the Middle East a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction. We recall in this regard the resolution that Syria submitted to the Security Council on October 29, 2003. We at the same time stress the need for compelling Israel to dismantle the hundreds of the nuclear warheads in its possession, to put its nuclear facilities under the safeguard regime of the IAEA and to adhere to the NPT.

Mr. President,

The crisis that erupted in the Caucasus region was an extremely important development. It is impossible to ignore its dimensions and repercussions on the international scene. By now it is abundantly clear who was responsible for igniting it, and is aware of the provocative acts that associated with it which prompted Russia to go for that option. We appreciate Russia's positive response to the efforts made by France in its capacity as President of the European Union to arrive at a settlement of this crisis that will guarantee regional stability and spare the world a replay of an older version of international relations that were relics of a past era.

Mr. President,

Much was said about the war on terror. Years after waging this war, we must ask though, is terrorism less widespread today than it was before? What victory can we claim over this extremely dangerous phenomenon? Accusing countries, for political motives, of sponsoring terrorism is a desperate attempt to justify the failure of the approach pursued by those promoting those claims. In our view, the right

approach requires addressing the root causes of terrorism. How can we overcome terrorism if we continue to mix up terrorism with the right of the human being to live on his land free from occupation or threat of war and aggression? We call upon all states to cooperate in the fight against terrorism. We particularly stress the need to avoid mixing up terrorism with fundamental rights because it does a service to terrorism and gives it an opportunity to strike.

Mr. President,

The experience of previous years proved that unilaterally dictating the world's political agenda is wrong. The wars and the financial and food crises raging through out the world today require that we work together to address this malfunction through an approach that seeks to engage all regional and international stakeholders through an active diplomacy using dialogue as the means and ways to settle controversial questions.

Closing the door to dialogue, imposing isolation, unilateral sanctions and diktat have never been a successful tool in the exercise of sound international relations. Contrary to claims made from this very rostrum a couple of days ago, all attempts of isolation were doomed to failure. Respect for the principle of democracy in international relations that takes into account the vision and interests of all states, large and small, will contribute to the realization of peace and stability in the world and help it solve the problems it is facing. The Charter of our international organization, in which states of different perspectives and interests enjoy equal membership, has set forth formulas that remain valid. They could be used to build a world in which justice will reign supreme based on mutual understanding, free from the threat of terror, a world in which there is not place for inciting hatred among cultures and religions. Promoting these values and objectives and using them as the guiding principle for our work will serve the interest of peace and stability in the world and will contribute to the good of humanity at large.

Thank you Mr. President,,