Statement by
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To the First Committee
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Of the General Assembly
General Debate

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Mr. Chairman,

I would like to congratulate you on the assumption of the Chairmanship of the First Committee. We have no doubt that with your long experience and wise guidance, the goals of this Committee will be fully achieved. I would also like to assure you of the Cyprus Delegation’s full support to your important task.

The Republic of Cyprus has aligned itself with the comprehensive statement delivered by the Danish Presidency of the European Union, and I will thus limit this intervention to some issues of particular interest to my delegation and report some recent initiatives of my Government in the field of disarmament.

Mr. Chairman,

We are much encouraged by the overwhelming response of the international community to the Ban of Anti-Personnel Mines. As you know, Cyprus is an original signatory to the Ottawa Convention and I wish to reiterate in this respect, that despite the continuing foreign occupation of almost 40% of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus and against a background of a constant threat posed by some 40,000 occupation troops stationed on the island, we are currently exerting all efforts to complete the ratification process before the end of the year. We are doing so, as an expression of our determination to join the international community in its efforts to eliminate this totally inhumane method of warfare.

In the meantime, as concrete demonstration of our political will and as part of our commitment to international norms such as the ones set by the Convention, we have already been taking several concrete steps in line with its aims. These include mine clearance operations, refurbishment of existing minefields, and the destruction of stockpiles. It is noted that the Government of Cyprus has since 1983 cleared ten (10) minefields adjacent to the buffer zone, and during the last two years destroyed more than eleven thousand mines of various types.

Furthermore, the Government of Cyprus has put forward a proposal for the clearing of all minefields laid within the buffer zone, in an effort to reduce tension and put an end to the threat against innocent human life, thus contributing to the return of these areas to conditions of normality and safety. We have indicated both to UNFICYP and UNMAS our determination to proceed unilaterally (in case the Turkish side does not cooperate in this regard) to work out in consultation with them, the modalities and the order to be followed in the process of clearing the National Guard’s minefields within the buffer zone.

Mr. Chairman,

We are currently engaged in direct talks under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, in order to reach a just, workable and lasting solution to the Cyprus problem, on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolutions. A matter of great concern both for the Government and the people of Cyprus is the issue of security.
In this context, I would like to recall once again the proposal made by President Clerides, for the demilitarization of the Republic of Cyprus, which we consider as a genuine offer for peace on the island and in the region at large.

President Clerides’ proposal calls for a specific programme aiming at the dismantling of all local military forces, the withdrawal of all foreign forces and settlers from the territory of the Republic of Cyprus and its demilitarization, as stipulated in the relevant United Nations resolutions. This proposal also envisages the stationing in Cyprus of an international force with an appropriate mandate from the Security Council.

It is within this context, Mr. Chairman, that my Government has decided and proceeded with the assistance of UNFICYP to the destruction of approximately 4,500 small arms, which have been under UN custody since 1972. This unilateral move by the Government of Cyprus was aimed at improving the climate of the peace talks and at heeding the call of the UN Secretary-General to reduce armaments on the island. I would also like to note that in March 2000, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus in agreement with UNFICYP proceeded with the destruction of the entire stock of ammunition imported with these arms.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to refer briefly to the Conference on Disarmament and to join previous speakers in expressing our concern for its continuing inability to undertake substantive work, including the immediate commencement of negotiations on the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty. With regard to the Conference’s membership, Mr. Chairman, the Republic of Cyprus reiterates its wish to participate fully in the work of the sole multilateral forum in the field of disarmament. We firmly believe that further enlargement of the Conference would not hinder in any way its effectiveness. On the contrary, the Conference’s reform and its expansion to all members wishing to participate in its work, might give a new impetus to the forum.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.