

## **Opening Statement by Dr. Bulent Kanol, Director, The Management Centre**

Your Excellencies, media representatives, fellow civil society members and distinguished guests,

In the name of The Management Centre of the Mediterranean I would like to welcome you all to this opening event of the Engage Programme which we have designed in collaboration with the NGO Support Centre in order to support the civil society in Cyprus to become more engaged in policy making and particularly contributing to the peace building process.

The Management Centre has been active in the field of civil society strengthening and capacity building since its first inception in 2001. Depending on the political environment and the state of the civil society there have been a number of programmes we implemented with the support of mainly UNDP, USAid and the EU. These programmes in the beginning were more mono-communal in nature and focused more on organizational issues of the civil society. During 2006-2008 we have managed to implement a strong programme as part of an international consortium made up of INTRAC of Oxford, NGO Support Centre active in the Greek Cypriot Community and us The Management Centre operating in Turkish Cypriot Community. The impact of this programme has been a contribution to the making of a more vibrant civil society particularly with the public benefit CSOs active in the fields of environment, human rights, community services, disadvantage minority and women issues. Traditionally public benefit CSOs in Cyprus has been weak in comparison to occupational and professional organizations, unions and business associations. Furthermore the public benefit organizations were more associated with political parties and religious organizations. One of the achievements of the Civil Society Strengthening Programme therefore was to contribute to the making of a more independent and vibrant public benefit civil society.

Our new programme ENGAGE is much more ambitious and we are launching this programme with the challenging aim of engaging the Cypriot Civil society in public policy making and reconciliation processes. We were aware of the difficulty of this process however at the same time we are aware of the general debate in the international arena on democratic deficit and the shortcomings of representative democracy. It is becoming a generally accepted phenomenon that legitimacy of any form of government or governance needs the participation of civil society in the decision making. So why the civil society should not become more involved and consulted in the reconciliation process in Cyprus? To what extent the sensitivity of talks at track 1 level should keep the civil society as spectators and not active players, if we really want to have a sustainable peace accord in Cyprus? One should stress at this stage that civil society organizations in no way can substitute the negotiating teams under the guidance of the leaderships but they can be a supporting and mobilizing force who has interests to be heard in the process.

These are the questions and issues open for dialogue this evening and we hope to be enlightened to better engineer our programme for the next two years with valuable insights we will get from our distinguished guests Ambassador Turkmen, Professor Coulumbis and all of the participants.

I have been asking the question for many years why do we have the UN here with a mandate from the Security Council? The answer I would have liked to hear was that they are here to help secure peace and reconciliation on the island and this should be where they should concentrate all their efforts.

I should therefore thank to UNDP and their donor USAid for their strong support to this Cypriot initiative and I will stress that I am observing a UNDP team bravely supporting the reconciliation process taking all the risks of attacks we are all certain to get from some extreme groups on both sides of the Green Line.

I would also like to thank Ambassador Turkmen and Professor Coloumbis for kindly accepting our invitation in such a short notice to share their wisdom with us. It is obvious that the leadership in both communities gave their strong support to this programme and this is why we have Representatives Nami and Yakovou with us this evening I would like to express my sincere thanks to both of them and to both leaders for this support. The strong support from the UN is also demonstrated by the presence of his Excellency Mr. Taye-Brook Zerihoun, the head of the UN mission on the island. And I would like to thank him for that.

My last but not least thanks goes to the ENGAGE team members from both The Management Centre and the NGO Support Centre who have worked so hard to organize this event. They have demonstrated that Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots can work as a team when there is a sound vision and a good cause.

Thank you all and hope you will have a productive and forward looking panel discussion.