



Opening Statement by Mr. Michalis Avraam, Executive Chairman, NGO Support Centre

Your excellencies, distinguished guests, media representatives, fellow civil society activists,

On behalf of the NGO Support Centre I would like to welcome you to our event "The Role of Civil Society in Peace and Reconciliation". The NGO Support Centre is a non governmental, non profit organization that was registered in 1999.

Our vision is that of a strong civil society in Cyprus. The Centre supports initiatives that strengthen the capacity of Cypriot NGOs and raise awareness about the role and importance of civil society in developing transparency and democratic procedures. We support and promote dialogue, networking and joint projects between Civil Society Organisations from all over Cyprus as well as reinforcing links with European and International Civil Society Organisations.

A strong Civil Society creates an environment where all views are expressed freely, are clearly heard and considered. It supports good policy decisions, actively participating in their formulation and implementation. It also questions and criticizes what is considered to be bad policy decisions and attempts to amend and improve them. The role of the NGO Sector and Civil Society is vital in formulating and implementing policy decisions at the local, regional, European and international level.

Building on the success of the Cypriot Civil Society Strengthening programme, which was completed in July 2008 by ourselves and the Management Centre, and whereby the emphasis was on developing the capacity of Civil Society groups and NGOs, we felt the need to take our efforts to the next level. Our aim is to increase the ability of NGO's to network and to effectively advocate for change with special emphasis on how the civil society can have a positive role in promoting peace and reconciliation in Cyprus. Out of these considerations, the ENGAGE programme was developed by the two partner organizations.

The programme secured funding from the United Nations Development Programme-Action for Cooperation and Trust with the support of USAID and we are grateful to them.

ENGAGE seeks to enhance the role of civil society in the reconciliation process thus supporting the efforts of the leaders of the two communities in reaching a solution to the Cyprus problem.



We consider the current status unacceptable and Cyprus a hostage of its political problem. We have a vision of a united Cyprus enjoying stability and long term sustainable economic prosperity.

The NGO Sector and Civil Society have a significant role to play during the period leading up to the solution and even more significant role to play following the solution.

There is a need to increase the channels of communication and dialogue between the two communities, to air concerns and to come up with suggestions of how to address issues of mutual interest. We need to build trust and cooperation and assist the reconciliation process. Above all we have to develop the vision of a united Cyprus.

I would like to thank the Head of UN Mission in Cyprus, His Excellency Mr. Zerihoun, the Leaders' representatives Mr. Iacovou and Mr. Nami, our distinguished panelists Ambassador Turkmen and Professor Couloumbis for their presence this evening and for their contribution to the success of this event.