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On behalf of the European Union I would like first of all to thank the Spanish Government for its generous hospitality and its outstanding organisation of a complex event.

I should like to extend my appreciation to the UNDP, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission for the full in-depth analyses of priority needs which have been carried out. They have given us a valuable guide for effectively channelling the international community's contributions to the rebuilding of Iraq.

I now wish to honour with you all those who have been so barbarously murdered in the past weeks. They wanted to build a free and sovereign Iraq, at peace with itself and with its neighbours.

I want to tell our Iraqi friends that the European Union believes in this vision, and intends to support it and work with them to achieve it. Their presence and role in the Conference go in the right direction, as hoped for by the Union: the Iraqis must take their political destiny into their own hands.

The Union welcomed the formation of an Iraqi Governing Council, which has since appointed an interim cabinet of ministers. We hope to see an early completion of that constitutional process, which is the only way to give Iraq democratic elections and restore its full sovereignty.

We trust that the unanimous approval of Resolution 1511, which represents a great moment of renewed international unity, will give a decisive impetus in this direction.

The European Union is ready to play its part in accordance with the United Nations Resolutions. This is a firm conviction shared by all Member States, a commitment which has been solemnly endorsed at every Council meeting.

Today we are assembled here precisely under Security Council Resolution 1483.

The Union has already maintained its pledge, allocating 730 million EURO for humanitarian aid. The European Commission decided that 200 million EURO should be allocated for the reconstruction effort up to the end of 2004, and this was endorsed by the Council last week. Today Member States will announce their contributions. This is the result of a common determination, that is able to react to security challenges and to the threat of sabotage and attacks. We are all aware of the strategic nature of the effort we are called upon to make.

The Commission's report, endorsed by the Council, urges us to see this Conference as the start of a process that will not stop in 2004. On the contrary, in view of changing circumstances, it should be seen as a medium term endeavour.

What do we mean by "changing circumstances"?

Namely, consolidation of security, the formation of a representative and internationally recognised Iraqi Government and lastly, coordinating mechanisms between the different actors working on reconstruction, so as to maximise the effect of the international effort.

In closing, I should like to give a brief account of Italy's contribution to the European effort.

A broad programme of assistance has been financed through a special bill for Iraq approved by the Italian Parliament. It has approved an humanitarian mission aimed at assisting rehabilitation and preparing reconstruction. It has as well authorised the deployment in the province of Dhi Qar of a contingent of 3.000 troops to the stabilisation force. This is a peace mission, a humanitarian one, aimed at restoring security to the area and to keep public order. In carrying out this important task, the Italian contingent has also been active in supplying technical support and in

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providing assistance to the people of Dhi Qar province. We have placed qualified staff in local structures and carried out direct humanitarian, rehabilitation and aid missions. In addition, the Italian Government has launched several programmes in the fields of health, water, agriculture and irrigation which will be carried out in close synergy with the Italian contingent.

In 2003 Italy also made contributions via multilateral channels. The total financial commitment amounts so far to 286 million EURO.

Today in Madrid the Italian Government is pleased to announce an additional contribution of 200 million EURO to be disbursed in the next three years.

Moreover, for the year 2004, the Italian Government will seek confirmation of its military contribution, the total cost of which amounts to about 230 million EURO every six months.

We sincerely believe that this will help to bring about the improvement in living conditions which the Iraqi people rightly deserve.

