

## Ban voices UN frustration at Cyprus delay

By James Blitz in London  
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Ban Ki-moon, UN secretary-general, has warned that Cyprus reunification talks run the risk of “foundering fatally” if Greek and Turkish leaders on the disputed island fail to reach an accord by next spring.

Amid growing fears in the international community that Cyprus will be formally partitioned next year, Mr Ban released a toughly worded report on Thursday, warning that the “critical window of opportunity” to reach a deal “is rapidly closing.”

The UN has been seeking to negotiate a settlement between Cyprus’ Greek and Turkish communities for some years.

Mr Ban has asked their representatives to report back to him in January on whether they are able to reach a deal which would create a single state on the island.

Mr Ban’s report on the protracted negotiations reflects the UN’s deep frustration over the failure to reach a deal after 88 rounds of talks.

Mr Ban signalled that a solution would become even more difficult if there was no agreement ahead of elections due to be held in both Turkey and the ethnic Greek Republic of Cyprus next year.

“If substantive agreement . . . cannot be concluded ahead of the election cycle, the talks may go into abeyance and there is a serious risk that the negotiations could founder fatally,” Mr Ban said in the report.

He appeared to indicate that the UN, which maintains a peacekeeping force along the line dividing the island’s Turkish north and Greek south, could withdraw from Cyprus altogether if talks failed.

“The United Nations will remain intensively engaged during this upcoming phase in the process,” Mr Ban said. “However, the destiny of Cyprus is largely in the hands of the leaders of both communities. In the coming days and weeks, they will set the future course for the island and its citizens. It is their choice to make.”

Representatives of the Greek and Turkish communities remain at loggerheads over whether thousands of displaced Cypriots should have the right to regain their property.

The lack of any real progress in the negotiations is creating deep frustration among some European Union member states, who see the dispute as a barrier to Turkey’s attempts to enter the EU.

Earlier this month, Jack Straw, the former British foreign secretary, wrote an article for the London Times in which he stated: “It is time for the UK government to consider formally the partition of Cyprus if the talks fail. This will be very controversial in the UN as well as in the EU.”

Mr Straw added: “Those who respond by inviting me to wash my mouth out with carbolic might like to say how much longer the EU and UN can tolerate the current approach, whose only consequence so far has been to paralyse the development of relations with Turkey.”