

Greeks bear gifts to UN ambassadors before Security Council election

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by Peter Hillmore

THE Greek government has invited all 185 ambassadors to the United Nations, and their wives, on an all-expenses-paid, week-long freebie to the Greek islands.

The diplomats will consider the problems of the world from the comfort of an airbed. The jaunt is part of Greece's campaign to gain a seat on the UN Security Council, and so far 110 ambassadors have accepted the gruelling assignment.

'High diplomacy is not as high-minded as it used to be,'

said one outraged ambassador last week.

A seat on the Security Council would be very useful for Greece, giving it extra influence in the event of any escalation in a dispute with Turkey over Cyprus.

There are 15 members of the Security Council, but only five, including Britain, are permanent members and the others are elected on a two-year basis.

Canada, the Netherlands, and Greece are the three candidates for two seats that become vacant next year.

All five ambassadors of the permanent members of the

Security Council have refused the invitation, but others have not been so scrupulous. According to diplomats in New York, no one raised any moral objections; instead, 'many wanted to know why their children had not been invited as well'.

Canada and the Netherlands are lagging behind in the freebie stakes, but are trying. Canada, aware that free flights to Ottawa are not the greatest of inducements, has only invited ambassadors to an evening at the Cirque du Soleil in New York.

The Dutch, displaying a lack of imagination, arranged

a riveting musical soirée at New York's Metropolitan Museum, so its chances must be zero.

Greece, which is denying its extravagant gesture has anything to do with its political ambitions, is just the latest international player to try to use more than arguments to argue its case.

Last year Japan, which was determined to win a permanent seat on the Security Council, invited all the ambassadors on a 'cultural visit' to Japan. There were rumours that the package included 'pocket money' during the trip.