Secretary-General’s Remarks at the Doha Forum [as prepared for delivery]

May 21, 2016

Office of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

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Your Highness Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar,  
Your Excellency Ms. Ameenah Gurib, President of Mauritius,  
Your Excellency Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, President of the Republic of Niger,  
Your Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the United Nations General Assembly,  
Honourable guests,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank the State of Qatar for generously hosting the Doha Forum.

We gather at a time of fragility and vulnerability.

Our world faces multiple armed conflicts, rising extremism and the widening impacts of climate change.

One hundred and thirty million people need life-saving humanitarian assistance.

War and persecution have forced 60 million people from their homes -- the most since the Second World War.

Here in the Middle East and Gulf region, millions of people are suffering the consequences of conflict, terrorism, inequality, regional rivalries and severe deficits in basic freedoms.

The scale of these challenges demands a more concerted global response.

We can draw encouragement from recent landmark agreements.

The Paris Agreement on climate change can help avert catastrophe while pointing the way toward an era of low-carbon growth.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an integrated and inspiring blueprint for peace and prosperity on a healthy planet.

The new framework takes aim at many of the drivers of instability and anger around the world.

It calls on us to fight corruption and joblessness, and to ensure that natural resources are managed for the many, not the few. It highlights the importance of building accountable institutions capable of providing services and justice for all.

The framework is also infused with human rights.  Its core commitment is to leave no one behind.

The goals, particularly Goal 16 on building inclusive societies, are a breakthrough in underscoring the inextricable links between development and peace.

Our challenge is to bring the Agenda to life in meaningful ways.

As we set our sights on the year 2030, we must do far more to end conflict and suffering in 2016.

We are striving to build a culture of prevention by stressing the peaceful resolution of disputes, and by focusing early on violations of human rights before they escalate.

On one of the major prevention challenges of our times – violent extremism – we must avoid short-sighted policies and heavy-handed approaches that only exacerbate the problem and give terrorists their best recruitment tools.

The United Nations is also strengthening peace operations to deploy quickly, with the right mandate at the right time, and with the necessary capabilities to make a difference.

And we are placing new emphasis on sustaining peace by addressing root causes, promoting reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development.

It is crucial to bring more voices to the table.  Women have a vital role to play, not just as recipients of protection but as agents of peace.  Young people are seen too often today as potential threats; we must empower them to realize their potential as peacebuilders, as recently emphasized by the Security Council in its landmark resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security.

And civil society must have space to play its crucial role.  I am profoundly concerned about new laws and attacks that infringe on the rights of NGOs, human rights defenders and the media.  Here in this region and elsewhere, excessively broad definitions of security end up undermining security.

Finally, we must do all we can to end the conflicts and violence that have set this region aflame, from Syria and Yemen to Libya, Iraq and Palestine.

On Yemen, the talks in Kuwait are critical for peace. I strongly urge the leaders of all parties to show the flexibility and wisdom needed to reach an agreement that will allow Yemenis to heal the wounds of this war and look ahead to a better future. I thank the Emir and the government of Kuwait for hosting these talks, and for their outstanding support to my Special Envoy.

As those efforts continue, the Saudi-led Coalition and all combatants must do more to avoid civilian casualties.  The already appalling humanitarian crisis is worsening, with more than 13 million people now in need of immediate, life-saving assistance, and more than 7 million severely food insecure.  Yet in the face of these numbers, our funding appeal remains woefully underfunded.  Where is the solidarity?

In Syria, the Government continues to drop barrel bombs on civilians, and place unconscionable and unlawful obstacles in the way of humanitarian aid.  A few days ago, even a consignment of baby food to a desperately deprived besieged area was deliberately blocked by the Government.

My Special Envoy continues to work intently with the parties towards meaningful talks.  We need a full and immediate cessation of hostilities.  Just as important, we need to begin discussions on the transition.  I fear that without such a political horizon, a further escalation is all too likely.

Yet again, I call on all regional and international actors to use their influence on the parties, and to persuade them to negotiate in good faith on transitional arrangements.  Is there anything more urgent than resolving this nightmare?

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tomorrow, I will leave Doha for Istanbul, where thousands of people will gather for the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit.

Humanitarian needs keep rising, outpacing the global response.  
Disasters are striking with greater frequency and force.

The Summit is a chance for all of us -- Governments, humanitarians and business leaders -- to agree on ways to better protect people, ensure access to those in need and build resilience.

Vulnerable people across the world are rightly asking, “where is the humanity?”

The World Humanitarian Summit is our opportunity to show we are listening – and acting to uphold it.

Together, we can move from aspiration to action, and set the world on a path towards the theme of this forum: stability and prosperity for all.

Thank you.