Remarks at UN Reform Event by Secretary-General António Guterres

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United Nations Office of the Secretary-General

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Mr. President, thank you very much for your engagement and support. I also thank Ambassador Haley for her leadership, her partnership and her commitment. And I am very grateful to all the leaders here today. Someone recently asked what keeps me up at night.

My answer was simple: bureaucracy.

Fragmented structures. Byzantine procedures. Endless red tape.

Someone out to undermine the UN could not have come up with a better way to do it than by imposing some of the rules we have created ourselves. I even sometimes ask myself whether there was a conspiracy to make our rules exactly what they need to be for us not to be effective.

Above all, let us never forget that we are here to serve.

To serve the people.

People suffering in poverty or exclusion … people victimized by conflict … people whose rights and dignity are being denied … but also people with ideas and dreams who need a helping hand.

Reform is for them.

Reform is for the hardworking taxpayers who underwrite all the crucial work we do.

And reform is for everyone serving under the UN flag, all of whom deserve the conditions to do their vital job.

To serve the people we support and the people who support us, we must be nimble and effective, flexible and efficient.

And we must do so keenly aware of our obligation to live up to the values of the United Nations Charter.

Together, we are making progress on a broad and bold reform agenda to strengthen the United Nations.

We have launched a game-changing strategy to end sexual exploitation and abuse.

We have embarked on plans to achieve gender parity in the UN; protect whistle-blowers; and strengthen counter-terrorism structures.

We are reforming our peace and security architecture – to ensure we are stronger in prevention, more agile in mediation, and more effective and cost-effective in peacekeeping operations.

We are reforming our development system to become much more field-focused, well-coordinated and accountable to better assist countries through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – our contribution to a fair globalization.

And to underpin all these efforts we are pursuing sweeping management reform – to simplify procedures and decentralize decisions, with greater transparency, efficiency and accountability.

These efforts reinforce each other – and they are all grounded in overarching principles. We are a global organization. 90 per cent of our personnel serve in the field.

We need to bring decision-making closer to the people we serve; trust and empower managers; reform cumbersome and costly budgetary procedures; and eliminate duplicative structures.

Mr. President, you have often said, and you repeat it today, that the UN has tremendous potential. All of us have a responsibility to make sure we live up to it.

Our shared objective is a 21st century UN focused more on people and less on process, and as you rightly said, more on delivery and less on bureaucracy.

We know that the true test of reform will not be measured in words in New York or world capitals.

It will be measured through tangible results in the lives of the people we serve – and the trust of those who support our work through their hard-earned resources.

Value for money while advancing shared values – that is our common goal.

I thank you very much for your support for these vital efforts. Mr. President, many thanks.