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Secretary-General-designate António Guterres

Remarks at swearing-in ceremony

New York, 12 December 2016

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for all your kind words. I am deeply honoured by the trust and confidence Member States have placed in me, and determined to be guided by the principles and purposes of the Charter.

First of all, I would like to pay tribute to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Secretary-General,

Your principled leadership has helped to chart the future of the United Nations -- through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; through your commitment to peace and security; through your initiative to put human rights at the heart of our work.

Under your direction, the world committed to the historic Paris Agreement on climate change – and ratified it in record time. I strongly believe this momentum is unstoppable.

Mr. President,

Twenty-one years ago, when I took the oath of office to become Prime Minister of Portugal, the world was riding a wave of optimism. The Cold War had ended; some described that as the end of history. They believed we would live in a peaceful, stable world with economic growth and prosperity for all.

But the end of the Cold War wasn't the end of history. On the contrary, history had simply been frozen in some places. When the old order melted away, history came back with a vengeance.

Hidden contradictions and tensions resurfaced. New wars multiplied, and old ones reignited. Lack of clarity in power relations led progressively to greater unpredictability and impunity.

Conflicts have become more complex -- and interlinked -- than ever before. They produce horrific violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses. People have been forced to flee their homes on a scale unseen in decades. And a new threat has emerged -- global terrorism.

Megatrends -- including climate change, population growth, rapid urbanization, food insecurity, and water scarcity -- have increased competition for resources and heightened tension and instability.

Mr. President,

At the same time, the last 20 years have seen extraordinary technological progress. The global economy has grown; basic social indicators have improved. The proportion of people living in absolute poverty has fallen dramatically.

But globalization and technological progress have also contributed to growing inequalities. A lot of people have been left behind, including in developed countries, where millions of old jobs have disappeared and new ones are out of reach for many. Youth unemployment has exploded. And globalization has also broadened the reach of organized crime and trafficking.

All this has deepened the divide between people and political establishments. In some countries, we have seen growing instability, social unrest, even violence and conflict.

Voters now tend to reject the status quo, and whatever government proposal is put to a referendum. Many have lost confidence not only in their governments, but in global institutions -- including the United Nations.

Mr. President,

Fear is driving the decisions of many people around the world.

We must understand their anxieties and meet their needs, without losing sight of our universal values.

It is time to reconstruct relations between people and leaders -- national and international. Time for leaders to listen and show that they care, about their own people and about the global stability on which we all depend.

And it is time for the United Nations to do the same: to recognize its shortcomings, and to reform the way it works. This Organization is the cornerstone of multilateralism, and has contributed to decades of relative peace. But the challenges are now surpassing our ability to respond. The UN must be ready to change.

Our most serious shortcoming – and here I refer to the entire international community – is our inability to prevent crises.

The United Nations was born from war. Today we must be here for peace.

Mr. President,

Prevention requires us to address root causes, cutting across all three pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, sustainable development and human rights. It must be the priority in everything we do.

Prevention requires us to better support countries in strengthening their institutions and making their societies more resilient.

It also means reinstating human rights as a value to be pursued for its own sake, not as a means to a political end. All people, including minorities of every kind, must enjoy the full range of human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural – without discrimination.

The protection and empowerment of women and girls is paramount. Gender equality is key to development, and there is growing evidence of its critical role in building and maintaining peace.

Prevention is not a novel concept – it is what the founders of the UN asked us to do. It is the best way to save lives and reduce human suffering.

Where prevention fails, we must do more to resolve conflicts.

From the acute crises in Syria, Yemen, South Sudan and elsewhere, to long-running disputes including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we need mediation, arbitration and creative diplomacy.

As part of my good offices, I am ready to engage personally in conflict resolution where it brings added value, recognizing the lead role of Member States.

Mr. President,

The scale of the challenges we face requires us to work together on a deep and continuous process of UN reform. I want to highlight three strategic priorities for change: our work for peace; our support for sustainable development; and our internal management.

The women and men working in UN peace operations are making a heroic contribution, at risk to their lives. But they are often tasked with peacekeeping where there is no peace to keep. Greater conceptual clarity and a shared understanding of the scope of peacekeeping must pave the way for urgent reforms.

We must create a peace continuum, from prevention and conflict resolution, to peacekeeping, peacebuilding and development. We must build on the conclusions of the three recent reports, and the parallel resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council. Inspired by the new concept of sustaining peace, it is time for us all to engage in a comprehensive reform of the UN strategy, operational set-up and structures for peace and security.

This reform must also include a review of our work on counter-terrorism, and a better coordination mechanism among the 38 UN entities involved.

Mr. President,

The United Nations system has not yet done enough to prevent and respond to the appalling crimes of sexual violence and exploitation committed under the UN flag against those we are supposed to protect.

I will work closely with Member States on structural, legal and operational measures to make the zero-tolerance policy a reality. We must ensure transparency and accountability – and offer protection and effective remedies to the victims.

Mr. President,

The second key element of the reform agenda concerns the United Nations support to Member States in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals -- an expression of global solidarity, with their promise to leave no one behind.

To do this, we will reposition development at the centre of our work, and engage in a comprehensive reform of the UN development system, at headquarters and country levels. This must involve leadership, coordination, delivery and accountability. We will build on the outcome of the recent discussions among Member States.

We must also bring the humanitarian and development spheres closer together from the very beginning of a crisis -- to support affected communities, address structural and economic impacts, and help prevent a new spiral of fragility and instability. Humanitarian response, sustainable development and sustaining peace are three sides of the same triangle.

This approach relates to the New Way of Working agreed at the World Humanitarian Summit. To achieve this, we need more accountability at three levels: each individual agency

carrying out its mandate; its contribution to the work of the UN system; and of the system as a whole. A strong culture of accountability also requires effective and independent evaluation mechanisms.

Mr. President,

The third key area is management reform. We will build on existing efforts and implement the recent initiatives. But looking at UN staff and budgetary rules and regulations, one might think some of them were designed to prevent, rather than enable, the effective delivery of our mandates.

We need to create a consensus around simplification, decentralization and flexibility. It benefits no one if it takes nine months to deploy a staff member to the field.

The United Nations needs to be nimble, efficient and effective. It must focus more on delivery and less on process; more on people and less on bureaucracy.

A culture of accountability requires strong performance management, and effective protection for whistleblowers.

And it is not enough just to do better. We must be able to communicate better about what we do, in ways that everybody understands. We need a substantial reform of our communications strategy, upgrading our tools and platforms to reach people around the world.

Finally, management reform must ensure that we reach gender parity sooner rather than later. The initial target for the equal representation of women and men among UN staff was the year 2000. Sixteen years later, we are far from that goal.

I pledge to respect gender parity from the start in all my appointments to the Senior Management Group and the Chief Executives Board. By the end of my mandate, we should reach full gender parity at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General levels, including special representatives and special envoys.

We need a clear road map with benchmarks to achieve parity across the system, well before 2030.

Finally, any investment in a stronger UN must take staff into account. I look forward to working once again alongside over 85,000 men and women carrying out our mandate in 180 countries across the globe. Many of them work in difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances. With their professionalism, expertise and dedication, they are the UN's most important resource – a resource that has to be cared for, developed and used effectively, and whose voice needs to be heard.

Mr. President,

We live in a complex world. The United Nations cannot succeed alone. Partnership must be at the heart of our strategy. We should have the humility to acknowledge the essential role of other actors, while maintaining full awareness of our unique convening power.

Our humanitarian and development efforts would be insignificant without the active involvement of Member States and the contribution of civil society, international financial institutions, private investors and financial markets. Several mediation efforts and peace operations would not be possible without the engagement of regional organizations, particularly the African Union.

Many important initiatives have been launched recently with our partners. We must now see them through before we introduce new ones.

But one missing link in our strategy is our work with young people. They have been excluded for far too long from making the decisions that will affect their futures.

We must build on the work that has been done with the support of Member States, the Youth Envoy and civil society. But this cannot be an initiative by old people discussing the younger generation. The United Nations must empower young people, increase their participation in society and their access to education, training and jobs.

Mr. President,

Today's paradox is that despite greater connectivity, societies are becoming more fragmented. More and more people live within their own bubbles, unable to appreciate their links with the whole human family.

In the end, it comes down to values. We want the world our children inherit to be defined by the values enshrined in the UN Charter: peace, justice, respect, human rights, tolerance and solidarity. All major religions embrace them, and we strive to reflect them in our daily lives.

The threats to these values are most often based on fear. Our duty to the peoples we serve is to work together to move from fear of each other, to trust in each other. Trust in the values that bind us, and trust in the institutions that serve and protect us.

My contribution to the United Nations will be aimed at inspiring that trust, as I do my best to serve our common humanity.

Thank you.