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THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

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Remarks to the 40th Session of the Human Rights Council

Geneva, 7 March 2019

Mr. President,
Members of the Human Rights Council,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for your invitation and this timely opportunity for an exchange of views.

The Secretary-General addressed this Council just days ago. Let me begin by reiterating his profound gratitude for this Council's essential work.

As he said, the Human Rights Council is "the epicentre for international dialogue and cooperation on the protection of all human rights -- civil, political, economic, social and cultural. Every door you open helps promote opportunity. Every right you secure is another brick in the building of a better world."

As I look around this room, I see builders.

I am honoured to be here to salute this Council for your outstanding contribution for human rights and, in particular, for Agenda 2030.

I want to reinforce our rock-solid commitment to delivering on people's rights and wellbeing through implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

I therefore welcome this invitation from the President of the Human Rights Council to meet with you today on how we can deploy the respective strengths of our different mandates in service of our shared goals: for people, no matter where they are, to be protected and respected, and to live their life with dignity and opportunity.

You are a vital part of the picture -- and I thank you for your recent intersessional meeting on human rights and the 2030 Agenda which will contribute to the high-level political forum on sustainable development in July.

As we look to the challenges ahead, let me set out five guiding propositions.

First, the 2030 Agenda is a People's Agenda.

It commits all of us to put people first and realize a more equitable and sustainable world – a world where no one is left behind.

It is a promise to secure peace and prosperity, which is founded in the respect for people's rights and their dignity.

It is a pledge to go beyond 'business as usual' to address emerging global challenges: climate change, peace and security, migration, inequality including gender inequality, multidimensional poverty and youth unemployment.

I think of the people I have met in my recent travels with the leadership of the African Union – in places such as the Lake Chad Basin and South Sudan – where the convergence of these issues compound the need for answers.

Let me tell you about one young woman I met in Chad by the name of Halima.

She was a child bride – married off to a member of a horrific extremist group. She was brainwashed into becoming a suicide bomber. She ultimately escaped that fate but not before she watched two of her friends blown up.

Halima's experience exposed, in the most tragic way, the interconnection between inequality, peace and security and basic human rights.

All of the key decisions about her life -- her education, her marriage, even her death -- were made for her.

Now, with support, she's getting her life back on track. But this denial of rights is being exploited every single day. And it's people like Halima we need to keep foremost in our minds as we think about the left behind.

The 2030 Agenda is your agenda, it's our agenda, it's Halima's agenda.

Second, human rights are core to the 2030 Agenda.

Human rights are an intrinsic part of sustainable development -- and sustainable development is a powerful vehicle for the realization of all human rights.

Implementing the SDGs means recognizing the interdependent and indivisible nature of all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, as well as the right to development. And it means delivering on these rights progressively.

Realizing the objectives of the SDGs means that people are able to fulfill their rights to adequate housing, clean water, health care, education and food as well as their right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

After all, 'leaving no one behind' is not a catch phrase. It is a call -- to empower people; to give them a voice; to ensure inclusiveness and equality.

It is a call to close the gaps in income and opportunity. And on this eve of International Women's Day, it's also a call to close the gender gaps.

As the Secretary-General noted to this Council, at present trends, it will take two centuries to close the gap in economic empowerment.

To quote the Secretary-General: “I do not accept a world that tells my granddaughters that economic equality can wait for their granddaughter’s granddaughters.”

Third, as the Secretary-General has warned, we are off track to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

We are falling behind in achieving the promise to ‘leave no one behind’.

We say that youth are the future, and yet youth unemployment is at record highs.

And where is the leap forward we promised women and girls?

Investments in the poorest countries are not keeping up with their needs, including needs related to population growth, unregulated migration and climate action.

Acts of terrorism, armed conflict and heavy-handed military responses, are compounding the problem and weakening the rights agenda.

Technology offers incredible gains but the reality is that, if we do not manage this progress well, it will leave large numbers of people further behind and exacerbate social inequalities, marginalization and polarization.

We are far from being able to protect ourselves from the disruptive risks of technology, for instance to employment opportunities and to the accountability of security services.

Hate speech is proliferating in all corners, exploiting inequalities and long-standing grievances in societies, and imposing obstacles to the building of inclusive societies.

And let us also acknowledge that many of those being left behind are not left behind by accident, or by some inevitable forces of global change.

Far too often, people are being left behind as a result of entrenched patterns of inequalities and discrimination, and policy choices at both the national and global levels, that fail to address them. Crucially, this includes our failure to commit the resources we need.

Yes, addressing all of this is an enormous challenge. But it’s also an opportunity to identify those who are being left behind and to carry them forward.

This means generating solid, accurate data. It means bringing in the voice of civil society and human rights defenders and heeding their call. This is all critical to put the spotlight on people falling through the cracks or lighting a candle for those left in the darkness, giving them hope for a brighter future.

So how do we stop the slide and reset the ambition with urgency?

That leads me to my fourth proposition: implementation of both the 2030 Agenda and human rights fundamentally depend on national leadership and ownership.

They provide the blueprint from which the UN assists Member States.

Improving this service is precisely what the reforms of the UN development system are all about.

Add all of these messages together and we reach my fifth and final point -- now is the time to urgently accelerate implementation of Agenda 2030. This also means accelerating our progress on realizing all human rights, including the right to development, for all.

We must leverage the multilateral system to secure progress and increase resources for the national-level implementation of the 2030 Agenda and human rights, including for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

We must engage all parts of the UN system, especially the UN human rights system.

The Universal Periodic Review and other human rights mechanisms are essential to this effort. They make key recommendations that can help advance the success of the SDGs at national level.

Countries can also show progress in achieving the SDGs by utilizing human rights reporting processes, such as the UPR which also provides a space for discussion and cooperation among stakeholders.

These review processes can complement the Voluntary National Reviews conducted at the high-level political forum for sustainable development.

The new Resident Coordinators will be critical.

The repositioned Resident Coordinator system will work to provide national authorities with a coordinated interface with whom to engage on a coordinated, transparent, responsive and accountable UN support for nationally-led development and human rights action.

The UN system must also extend its support to national governments to help them engage with and through other multilateral and bilateral channels.

We must all engage more meaningfully with the private sector and other stakeholders, including to secure the means of implementation.

We must facilitate the free, active and meaningful engagement of national civil society in SDG implementation and monitoring.

And as the UN, we must lead with our actions.

For example, the Secretary-General has launched a fresh approach for the UN System on disability inclusion – so that we practice what we preach and deliver what the 2030 Agenda demands – a much greater focus on supporting persons with disabilities.

The Secretary-General has also made historic progress on gender parity, demonstrating how much we can achieve with commitment and political will.

For the first time, there is parity in among Resident Coordinators and we have the highest numbers of women in senior management roles in the history of the Organization – more than half – and are well on track to the target of parity at the top levels by 2021.

And – again for the first time in history – each and every leader of our five Regional Economic Commissions around the world are women.

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

Let me thank you once again for this opportunity.

We have important work ahead of us. But I have no doubt that together, we will get to a world that leaves no one behind -- a world where promises made are promises kept, for people and planet, for human rights and human dignity.

Thank you for your leadership. Let's keep hope alive for the millions who daily live a life of hunger, fear, indignity, violence, intimidation and atrocities beyond our imagination. It is our job to be their voice, listen, amplify and create the enabling environment to act to end their suffering, so they may all know peace, prosperity and a life of dignity.

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