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Secretary-General

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SECRETARY-GENERAL, IN ADDRESS TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY, CALLS 'TYRANNY' OF STATUS QUO 'ANOTHER BRAKE ON OUR COMMON PROGRESS'

Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's address in New York on 22 January:

Let me start today's discussion by thanking you for your support and encouragement throughout 2012. At the beginning, I offer you my best wishes for your continued good health and success throughout 2013 and beyond.

For several years now, we have come together in January for dialogue on our shared efforts to meet our shared goals. This year, we meet amid tremendous turmoil and uncertainty. From armed conflict in Africa and the Middle East to economic and environmental distress across the globe, we are being tested every minute of every day.

One year ago, with waves of monumental change surging around us, I called for equally dramatic steps to transform the human condition. I identified five areas where needs are greatest and where collective action can make the greatest difference. They are sustainable development, prevention, supporting nations in transition, building a more secure world, and empowering women and young people.

These imperatives, these generational opportunities, flow naturally from the eight priorities the General Assembly has set for the United Nations. They are sustainable development, peace and security, human rights, humanitarian assistance, disarmament, justice, the development of Africa, drug control, crime prevention and combating terrorism.

My fervent hope, and our common urgent need, is that we can stop moving from crisis to crisis, from symptom to symptom, and instead address the underlying causes and inter-relationships, and recognize the flaws in many of our approaches. I am pleased to report today on what we have achieved together in some of the areas — and where concerted action today can yield great gains tomorrow.

Two thousand and twelve was a year of turbulence, but also one of tangible gains. The Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development was an important step forward. Last month in Doha, we kept climate negotiations on track. This is a priority for me and I intend to engage world leaders individually and collectively next year to mobilize political will for a robust, global and legally binding climate change instrument by 2015.

Discussions on the post-2015 development agenda got off to a strong start. Forty-four countries adopted plans to accelerate their work on the Millennium Development Goals. Economic growth in Asia, Africa and Latin America remained strong, bringing millions out of poverty and in from the margins.

The General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution on female genital mutilation, and we marked the first-ever International Day of the Girl Child, setting the stage for greater protection from discrimination, abuse, child marriage and forced recruitment as soldiers.

My Education First initiative brought added focus on equal opportunity for all children, and last week, I announced the appointment of the United Nations first-ever Envoy for Youth — Ahmad Alhindawi of Jordan.

Our peacekeeping operation in Timor-Leste successfully completed its mission. Elections in Sierra Leone marked another milestone. We deployed mediation experts to 22 countries, reflecting a heightened emphasis on prevention and rapid response.

Libya, Myanmar, Somalia and Yemen all moved, with United Nations assistance, to consolidate democratic reforms. United Nations efforts to support countries in transition — including those on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission — helped strengthen prospects for longer-term peace.

We deepened our ties with regional organizations, from the African Union and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) to the Arab League and European Union. The General Assembly adopted a major resolution on human security. We introduced new rigour to the selection of personnel for United Nations missions. In the face of natural disasters and other emergencies, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) disbursed more money to more countries than ever, making it a fund by all, for all.

Last year also saw the conviction of former Liberian President Charles Taylor for war crimes and crimes against humanity, a new landmark in consolidating international criminal justice in this age of accountability. And the first-ever high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the rule of law adopted a far-reaching declaration that gives us a new tool, at both the national and international levels, to strengthen the work for peace and security, development and human rights.

These achievements, and many more like them, spanned the full range of United Nations priorities. We responded to crisis, tried new approaches and built new foundations for a better future. I am encouraged, but I am far from satisfied. The stresses of our times, the pressures on our planet, the pain of the people we serve — all this demands that we do better in 2013.

We can start next Wednesday at the Syria Humanitarian Conference that I am convening in Kuwait. I appeal to Member States to send high-level delegations and come forward with generous pledges. I call on Syria's neighbours to continue to allow those seeking refuge to cross borders to safety. And I thank His Highness the Emir of Kuwait for his very generous position to convene this meeting together with me.

We must do everything we can to reach Syrians in need. We must intensify our efforts to end the violence through diplomacy, overcoming the divisions within Syria, the region and the Security Council. I call again for all States to cease sending arms to either side in Syria.

We remain a long way from getting the Government and opposition together to make the key decisions about the country's future that only Syrians can make. In the meantime, we must make it clear that all perpetrators of atrocity crimes in Syria will be held to account.

Syria is one among several crises that have led to the largest refugee flows since the Kosovo crisis 13 years ago. Other large-scale displacements are taking place in Mali and the Sahel. Mali is under threat from terrorists, with regional and global repercussions. Addressing these challenges requires political, security and humanitarian efforts. At the same time, in calibrating the extent of its own involvement, the United Nations has to carefully take into account the human rights, safety and security issues at stake.

Working with African and international partners, we must do our part to help fully restore Mali's constitutional order and territorial integrity. Meanwhile, we continue to work towards an integrated strategy for the Sahel region that would address the mix of extremism, poverty, drought and governance challenges that is causing such profound misery and dangerous insecurity.

This year we must also re-consider our approach to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I have been in close contact with President [Joseph] Kabila of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other leaders of the Great Lakes Region to establish a new peace and security framework to break the appalling cycle of violence. I hope the Framework will be signed at the upcoming African Union Summit.

2013 will be a critical year for the Middle East peace process. As illegal settlement activity continues and Israelis and Palestinians remain polarized, five key priorities stand out: first, we must renew collective international engagement; second, we must resume meaningful negotiations; third, we must preserve stability in Gaza; fourth, we must make progress on Palestinian reconciliation; and fifth, we must prevent the financial collapse of the Palestinian Authority. Concerted action is essential if we are to salvage the two-State solution.

We need to do more to advance the Responsibility to Protect in the face of grave crimes and incitement, and avoid undoing the great progress we have made. In both Syria and Mali, we must do everything we can to keep those conflicts from generating reprisal killings that escalate into widespread ethnic and sectarian warfare, and even genocidal activities.

And we need to advance the rule of law on disarmament and non-proliferation. I urge you to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty into force. Conclude negotiations on an Arms Trade Treaty in March. Fulfil the Action Plan adopted at the 2010 NPT [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons] Review Conference. Begin negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament without further delay. And convene a conference this year on establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

We will press ahead in 2013 on the paramount challenge of sustainable development. In September, there will be a special event on the Millennium Development Goals to assess progress and discuss the contours of an ambitious, practical and coherent post-2015 development framework. Towards this end we will draw on the work of my High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, which will report to me at the end of May. Global consultations and other processes will also be key parts of this process.

I am pleased to note the imminent adoption by the General Assembly of a resolution establishing an open working group on the sustainable development goals. Let us do our utmost to inspire and mobilize the world behind this effort.

In September the General Assembly will hold high-level meetings on migration and on the rights of people with disabilities. We will prepare for conferences on the least developed countries and small-island developing States, to be held in 2014. And we will advance preparations for a World Humanitarian Summit, to be held in 2015.

We continue our campaigns against violence based on sexual orientation. I urge Member States to come to the March session of the Commission on the Status of Women with specific plans to end violence against women, including through UN-Women's new COMMIT initiative. And we have high hopes for ESCWA's (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) recently launched work with regional bodies to establish an Arab Women's Observatory to monitor and promote progress, protection and participation.

Our work at the national and international levels requires solidarity and mutual understanding. Next month at its forum in Vienna, the Alliance of Civilizations will continue its work to counter extremism and hatred. Whether on the world stage or in their communities, leaders have a responsibility to speak the language of tolerance and respect, not division and defamation.

Lasting solutions to global problems no longer lie in the hands of Governments alone. The United Nations of the twenty-first century must think in terms of networks and coalitions. I am pleased to report that the Every Woman Every Child alliance has generated more than \$10 billion in new resources on life-saving health interventions. The Scaling Up Nutrition movement is making inroads

against malnutrition and childhood stunting. The Sustainable Energy for All initiative will bring in more partners and pledges in 2013.

We will continue to explore where else to apply this model. I am putting forward a proposal to the General Assembly, through the regular budget process, for a United Nations Partnership Facility to accelerate our efforts. I ask for your strong support.

I reiterate my gratitude to the Member States for the generous investments in the Capital Master Plan. We have returned to a modernized Secretariat building. The renovation of the General Assembly will begin in May this year, and is expected to be finished late next year, along with the renovation of the Conference Building already under way.

We are moving ahead, with your blessing, on the deployment of our Enterprise Resource Planning system, Umoja, and the implementation of International Public Sector Accounting Standards, called IPSAS. Other major change management efforts include the integration of research, training and library services, and the moves towards a digital Secretariat through technological solutions such as the paper-smart concept, which I saw in action at the Doha climate change conference.

I look forward to your approval of the proposed mobility framework in March. The sooner the Organization can enjoy the benefits of a truly global workforce and Secretariat, the better. I also look forward to continued dialogue on reforming the backstopping and funding of our political missions.

We in the Secretariat are well aware of the severe financial constraints that define our work. As I told the staff at a town hall meeting earlier this month, no one can afford a so-called greenhouse mentality in which there is always sun and water to nourish what we do.

It will be very difficult to cut a further \$100 million from the budget for the next biennium, over and above the efficiencies I had already identified, as you have asked. But we are, of course, committed to budget discipline. At the same time, as demands continue to grow, it is unrealistic to think that substantial budget reductions will have no impact. It is unsustainable for Member States to add and add while the Secretariat is asked to cut and cut. I urge you to consider reviewing mandated activities that may have been fulfilled or overtaken by new developments. I appeal to you to review your practices, and find efficiencies there, too. Let us work together to weather the current financial storm.

This is no time for business as usual. To shape the future we want, we will have to think and act innovatively and differently. We will have to throw off another brake on our common progress — the tyranny of the status quo. Too often, Governments and our international machinery operate on auto-pilot. Issues remain in their silos; worrying trends are allowed to persist and unfold, all because “that is the way things have been done”, or because true change is seen as costly or unrealistic, or entrenched interests have a hold on the legislative machinery.

This Organization has a solid record of achievement. United Nations staff across the world continue to perform heroically, often under daunting circumstances. But we must do more than save lives, central as that is to our mission. We must save our very future.

Let us make the year ahead one in which we rise above disunity and the lowest common denominator, and show the world that good international solutions are in the national interest. I repeat that international solutions are in the national interest.

The decisions we take — or fail to take — in the crucial next few years will shape the world for decades to come. Let us be wise, responsible and forward-looking. Let us work as one to deliver for all.

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