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THE NEW GLOBAL LANDSCAPE
The UN and the Muslim World

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by

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Thank you very much, Dr Nizami. I am very glad to be here in such a legendary place, Oxford, and to see the sun shine a couple of hours after my arrival. I am also very glad to see old friends and young friends; Lord Hannay, Lord Williams from the House of Lords, we worked together, and Edward Mortimer, a very close confidant and collaborator with Kofi Annan. We have known each other since days in the Financial Times, a long time ago. It is great to be with you and of course, I am extremely grateful to be invited to this well-known and much respected Centre. I congratulate you, Director, and all your colleagues on the new building that I walked through this afternoon. It is a tremendously beautiful place, which reminds me both of what I think is Oxford (I hope am not misunderstanding Oxford traditions), and at the same time Islamic culture. In a deeper sense I think it is very important now that this area of Islamic Studies is pursued in such a respected place as Oxford and in such a strong, Western European country as the United Kingdom, and that you help in your way to make sure that religion is a uniting factor and not a dividing factor, that religion can be an expression of peace rather than of conflict. And we have certainly conflicting tendencies in today's world. So I see your studies in the context of the very important objective of bringing us all together, which of course is also the mission of the organisation I represent.

I thought I would start on a lighter note because you gave me such a kind introduction, of course it was a gentle reminder of my age also, I must admit. But I was once introduced in New York at a lecture, and I understood there was something wrong as I did not recognise the audience. You can feel in the room where there is a foreign policy audience. But this was not a foreign policy audience. Dreamy eyes and long beards on the men, and I was wondering what happened, but then I looked at the invitation that was in front of me and I realised what had happened. It was a very, very embarrassing misprint in the invitation. In my CV it says that I have a long experience in conflict resolution and mediation, going back to all those disputes you mentioned. But the invitation said: "Come and meet Ambassador Eliasson. He is an expert on conflict resolution and meditation." So I am evidently in the right room today, no misprint, thank you Director.

I start with a couple of banalities. We live in a period of turmoil. Andrew Gilmour and I were talking about this just the other day and we think that there are more conflicts erupting than we can ever recall at the same time. Our simultaneous capacity in dealing with conflict resolution is tested every day. It's just exploding around us. We are sitting in a meeting about Syria. Then suddenly we have a meeting on Somalia, and then the Ukraine, Sudan, Afghanistan, all at the same time. Nigeria we have now added to the list. Of course, this is an indication that we live in an age that is a test for multilateralism, and even further a test of institutions - national institutions and regional ones. Governments and the European Union and the UN are all crucially important, of course, but their roles, or at least their performance are being severely questioned, in different ways. So, what we are experiencing is this strange paradox; the United Nations, and multilateralism, are intensely needed, but at the same time their role is subject to intense questioning.

This is also manifesting itself in a rather dangerous trend in public opinion where you have people turning inward, rather than outward, and apparently seeing the outside world as a

problem, rather than offering potential and opportunity. The current discussion about globalisation does not simply welcome it as a blessing. There are aspects of globalisation that certainly create problems in terms of inequalities and differences in how the riches in the world are divided. But when you have a situation when you really have to struggle to find reasons to stay on the multilateral course, we who are in the area of helping multilateralism work have a very, very important duty. I would go as far as to say that if we are to be successful with multilateralism we have to be able to prove that point. I am thinking of areas like climate change, or migration. We have to be able to prove the point that the good international solution, the good international formula is, in today's world, in the national interest of every member state.

Think about this. What would it mean if you were in the parliaments in the world, among the editorial writers, in the same society, come to the conclusion that yes, indeed, this good international solution arrived at after compromises among nations, is in our national interest. We have a long way to go. The larger countries in the world, in particular, have difficulty coming to this conclusion. But I think and I hope that in the end we will be able to prove the point to them. But that means we have to deliver, as the United Nations.

So with this more conceptual framework as background, I would like to mention just three areas of the United Nations in which we are active, and in fact these three areas are the pillars, in my view, of the United Nations.

When I was President of the General Assembly, which you kindly referred to, in 2005 to 2006, I was very proud to pick up something that maybe you, Edward Mortimer, wrote. It was that there can be no peace without development. We picked that up and built on it. But there can also be no development without peace. And there is no lasting peace, or sustainable development, without respect for human rights and the rule of law. So peace, development and human rights are the three pillars, I would say, not only of a good international order, but also of national government. And all these three priorities have to be pursued at the same time.

I remember when I was a student I had a professor who claimed that I would bring him into endless disputes. I had problems with my exam paper on that, because they claimed that first you had peace, then you had development, and then you could exercise human rights. I found that pretty primitive. Well I made it anyway in the foreign office exam.

Anyway, these three objectives have to be pursued at the same time. This means that we have to think and work more, if I may put it this way, horizontally rather than vertically in the United Nations, and I would recommend this for our national institutions. We are far too much centred, in my view, on silos and working vertically in our own fields. You have to be extremely good in the field in which you choose to work, but if we are to make a difference in today's world, with the enormously complex problems we live with, we need to work horizontally, across lines and disciplines, something you do in your Centre, by the way. This means that at the same time as we work on a conflict, we think about developmental aspects, human rights aspects and the rule of law and bring these sectors in. One advantage of being Deputy Secretary-General is

that I can exercise a convening power, as we say, to bring the different actors around the problem together and then to address all the political, developmental and human rights aspects, for example in addressing the post-2014 situation in Afghanistan. I will come back to that in a minute.

So I will just mention the key issues that we deal with in each of these sectors, then you can pursue these further in the question and answer period because I will have to do it very superficially if I want to cover the whole area. And at the end I would also like to have time to say a few words about the emerging new global landscape.

In the area of peace and security, of course the most pressing, and I would also say the most frustrating, issue is the ongoing horror in Syria. I went into our Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon's, office in October 2012, almost two years ago, and I told him that our mediator at the time, Lakhdar Brahimi, was going to meet President Assad. He said "wonderful, thank you." "Ah, yes", I said, "but it's in ten days' time", and then he suddenly slowed down and kept thinking, and then he said "ten days, ten days, that is 1,000 to 1,500 people dead". So he counted the delay in Lakhdar Brahimi's meeting with President Assad in terms of 100 to 150 people dying every day, which has been the average rate for three years now. It is a very heavy burden for us to see this continue. We will do our very best, as you know, and I will come back to a few points, but I must say that without a strong Security Council resolution, and without a Security Council role at all in the political process, we have limited room for manoeuvre. What we can do, of course, is to continue the humanitarian work, which is becoming a huge task. I don't need to repeat all the figures; they are probably known to you. Let me just mention the refugee figure. There are now 2.2 million people outside the country. When I was in Lebanon in December 2012 together with Pim Valdre, my colleague here, there were 150,000 refugees in Lebanon. Now there are 1,100,000. Half of them are children, by the way. So a whole generation is lost. And the situation inside the country is unbearable for many, many people. We cannot even reach certain areas. I think it is shameful that human rights law is disregarded, I think it is shameful that we have to negotiate over basic humanitarian law, which is the case now when we have problems mounting humanitarian operations both across lines and across borders.

But the other issue is of course to continue to try to use the political space that is available. Political space was created by Kofi Anann and his mediation team during 2012. That was the biggest step forward towards a political solution. They achieved a formula which was the basis, and should continue to be the basis, for peace in Syria, namely, that a government, a transitional governing body, has to be created with full executive powers. That was achieved on 30th June, and I still regret, very deeply, that the Security Council did not come to a Security Council resolution in the month of July after this very successful mediation which included discussion with both the parties and the key member states, including the key permanent members of the Security Council, all five of them in fact.

The reason why the Syria crisis is so serious is also, of course, and this relates directly to your interest in the Islamic world, the growing sectarianism that has been developing; this horrible

trend of animosity between Shi'as and Sunnis, which is now being exploited. People in Syria talk about themselves, as you know better than I, as being Alawites or Sunnis rather than being Syrians. The problem with that is, of course, also that bringing in that dimension risks the conflict spreading into the neighbourhood through that element of sectarianism, as Michael Williams knows very well. You have, in fact, people taking part in the war inside Syria from Lebanon and elsewhere.

So the sectarian dimension has brought in the regional dimension. The Security Council should really look to the future and take a step towards avoiding a threat to international peace and security. The risk of this conflict having an effect both in Lebanon and, I would say very seriously, in Iraq, is very grave. So we should take that into account and I hope very much, now that Lakhdar Brahimi has decided to resign from his present function, we will soon be able to find another one of the best negotiators, to take over from Kofi Anann and Lakhdar Brahimi. I hope also that we will have some soul searching among those member states who are most influential in affecting the situation in Syria. It is obvious that there are the permanent five and countries in the region like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey. We need to have some realisation in the area and among the P5, that the illusion of military victory must be discarded. There is no military solution. There is no military solution. And, if there were to be a military solution, you would have another horror coming the day after a so-called military victory. I just hope that this realization sinks in and that we draw the appropriate conclusion when it comes to arms deliveries, de-escalation of the conflict, and starting serious talks. That is the work in which the Secretary-General and I are now very deeply involved. After a short period of intense and deep reflection, the Secretary-General will very soon present his thoughts and I hope we will have a strong negotiator to take over the job from Lakhdar Brahimi.

Now I have a long list of other conflicts, so I will not go through that in detail, but I think some of them are relevant for this audience. I would mention two conflicts in more detail where unfortunately we have seen growing animosity, growing tensions between the Muslim community, and in one case the Christian community, and another case the Buddhist community. I am thinking of course of the Central African Republic and of Myanmar. Here is another example of these sectarian, religious or ethnic factors being used in such a way that the emotional quality of the conflict becomes stronger and, for us who are in the diplomatic trade, so much more difficult to deal with, when you have these more primordial identities being recognised as the dividing factor. We see that now in the Central African Republic, where Muslims and Christians were living harmoniously together, I am told. I do not have personal experience of the Central African Republic, but I understand there was not a problem between Muslims and Christians there until it suddenly became part of a power game and now we have a situation where 300,000 Muslims have fled the country and we are faced with huge dilemmas. Should we try to protect the few Muslims hiding in the south? But is the risk that they will be killed there because our presence in terms of peace-keepers is limited? It is a huge dilemma for us.

In Myanmar, I have some background myself when I was emergency-relief coordinator in the

early '90s, David Hannay knows that I actually negotiated the return of 50,000 Rohingyas in 1992. It's an old problem and all around us were astonished that Rohingyas were not considered a recognized minority in the country. This is a huge issue for the country. We all welcome the reform efforts of the new leadership in Myanmar. They have made huge steps, very important progress. But this of course is an issue that could weaken this reform effort.

I will leave some of the other situations aside and move on to the second pillar. That is the development pillar. One of the best tools that we have had in the United Nations as a vehicle for development which has been translated onto the ground and in the member states, and even local communities, are the so called millennium development goals, the eight goals that were established in 2000, and which have worked very well as a planning instrument. I would not say that they have been successful in all respects. We have still huge progress to make in maternal health. We have much progress to make on sanitation. Provision of clean water is going relatively well. I am leading an action, a call for action, on sanitation which is starting to get some traction.

There is some important progress in education, particularly primary education. Nowadays children in Africa, girls and boys, fortunately in the same numbers, are getting primary education, and extreme poverty is also much lower. We have in fact reached the goal, although in my belief it was set at too modest a level. But anyway, this is, as you know, very much the result of the progress in Asia, and not least China and India. What is important now is that we should work very hard to achieve as much as possible of these goals. They come to an end by the end of next year. So what is even more important, and a huge task, a daunting task, but also an extremely stimulating and inspiring task to me, is that we must now set the goals for the period 2015 to 2030. And if we are successful, maybe these goals, adapted to the reality of 2015 to 2030 could serve the same purpose as the MDGs becoming tools and vehicles for countries to move forward in fighting poverty and standing up for sustainability.

I would say these are the two major elements in this new set of goals. Poverty relief, or poverty reduction, is unfortunately of course still the primary one, but also sustainability. Poverty reduction will be more complicated than it might seem on the surface because of the trend of inequality which is so obvious in the world. We now have a situation where more poor people, according to the UN definition of poverty, are living in middle income countries than in poor countries. So fighting poverty is very much a challenge for middle income countries.

We also have to come away from the charity aspects of earlier discussions about the situation in the poor countries and not only think of official development assistance, which has to be continued of course, and raised, but about the transformative change necessary. People in Africa, Asia, Latin America are asking for jobs. They are asking for industrialisation. They are asking for good infrastructure. They are asking for methods for handling urban growth. These are huge changes, and very fundamental ones. Therefore we need to have a set of goals which mobilises not only foreign ministries and development ministries, but also other parts of government, not only finance ministries but also the private sector, civil society, the academic world, all other

actors. Nobody can do everything, but everybody can do something. I hope that we will be able to formulate a sustainable development goal in the next year or so that, by September next year, we will be ready at the 70th anniversary of the United Nations to launch these goals.

Sustainability has to be added. About 20 years ago there was a contradiction seen between standing up for the environment and fighting poverty and achieving growth. Nowadays I think all countries realise that growth has to be sustainable. We see the effects of drought. We see the effects of floods. We see what happens to the air and to the rivers. We need to make sure that we have a sustainable structure, and I think climate change now is disputed only by very, very few. We may have a Plan B in life, I guess you all have a Plan B for your different pursuits in life. But you certainly have no Planet B. There is no Planet B and we need to move towards making peace with nature. So sustainability has to be added to poverty eradication. And then I would like to add a last factor for these goals which I hope will be part of the goals, and that is the need for institutions: the need for governors, for governments, the need for the rule of law. In practical terms, anti-corruption efforts, standing up for women's rights, children's rights, all the stability, that rule of law and the rights perspective support developmental efforts. But unfortunately this has become rather controversial. I regret that is the case because I don't think this is in fact an attempt to interfere in internal affairs as some might claim. It is in fact what is necessary to achieve development, and development not only for countries, but for regions and for the world. So I would hope that the member states, also in their enlightened self-interest, will add quality development of governance and the rule of law to the efforts on sustainability and poverty eradication.

Before I leave this rule of law and the rights perspective I would like to add something on human rights in this perspective. If you adopt the principle, the formula that I mentioned at the beginning, no development without peace, no peace without development and none of the above without human rights, then of course human rights has to permeate the development, and also the work on the peace and security. Putting human beings at the centre of the United Nations, which has a Charter, with the first three words 'we the people', must be absolutely vital. The Secretary-General has agreed to us taking an initiative which we call 'Rights Up Front', human rights up front, which is meant both to send a message that human rights is to be an element in all our work, something that everybody working in our organisation must know and have in their fingertips, but also that human rights violations, as many of you know, are the first sign of a conflict erupting. You can analyse the conflicts of the last 40 or 50 years and you can almost always see that they very often start with human rights violations.

Well, if conflict starts with human rights violations, why should we wait until mass human rights violations turn into mass atrocities before we act more decisively? This was a result of a study made by a friend of ours, a colleague of ours, Charles Petrie, who, after analysing the Sri Lanka tragedy in 2009, at the end of that war, came to the conclusion that the UN was guilty of systemic failure in not acting in time in Sri Lanka. Therefore a group, in which Andrew Gilmour also played a role, came up with a proposal which I took on personally and presented to the Secretary-General. It has now been presented to member states and we have as of now

received a relatively positive, I would say warm, welcome. But what it will mean in practice is that we have to go to the Security Council before conflict arises. Judging from certain elements that we will study, particularly human rights violations to give those early warnings, we will then hopefully have steps taken, fact-finding missions, semi-monitors, human rights monitors, inspiring quiet diplomacy. Dag Hammarskjöld, a former Secretary-General, was a master at this, finding different ways of reaching parties through neighbours or influencing other actors, more foreign diplomacy, anyway a long list of actions to be taken at the stage of human rights violation in order to prevent a conflict from exploding in our face.

We have started in that spirit recently by, I think, in both cases not early warning but late warning. In the Central African Republic where we probably should have sounded the alarm earlier, in the end we were extremely dramatic about the developments in November and I think the French in particular picked that up and steps were taken to avoid what could have been an even worse disaster than we have seen in the Central African Republic. In the case of South Sudan in the spirit of the 'Rights Up Front' initiative, we opened up the gates of the UN compounds and camps when the Nuer and Dinkas were killing each other in great numbers and I think I can say fairly that we, by that saved thousands of lives in those horrible days that those gates were open. That would not have been done without this initiative. This is what I wanted to say on the third pillar of the United Nations, human rights.

Let me now say a few words about the new global landscape, as I call it. I sometimes tell my colleagues at the United Nations that we, in this organisation, must reflect three realities. We must see the United Nations as a mirror reflection of the world as it is, whether we like it or not, with the violence, with the human rights violations, with the extreme poverty, with the inequalities. We had better know this. Do not have any romantic views. You have to be making a very hard-nosed realistic analysis of what goes on. That is the starting point, that is the reality. The second reality we have to reflect is also the emerging new realities, the emerging new trends, so that we can be advanced, be working for the international environment. And the third reality that we have to reflect is the world as it should be. The world, as it is, is a pretty nasty place, but the world as it should be is what is represented in the UN charter and the universal declaration of human rights, and the reason why many of us, and many of you I am sure, believe in international cooperation, believe in the spirit and values of this organisation, and our job is very simply to diminish the gap between the world as it is and the world as it should be. Just a little bit, but at least we are trying.

So what are the emerging new elements in that global landscape? I will not go through this in detail as I promised I would finish within five or ten minutes. I will give you the headings. What are the new elements in the new realities? Of course the new geo-political geo-economic landscape; Asia and the emerging economies: I need say no more. The second new reality, which was not a reality, at least for my parents, is climate change. The threat of nature; no Planet B. It is new. What else is new: mass migration. A quarter of a billion people live in countries where they are not born. What else is new: urbanisation. 60% of humanity will live in urban areas in five years. In 2030 it will be 75%. Imagine what this means in terms of stress on infrastructure,

effects on water and sanitation; a number of the consequences are so obvious. Now the new, and enormously important, factor is, as the younger people in this room know much better than I, the revolution in information and communication which is changing the map completely. The world becomes smaller. Nothing can be hidden any more. Hundreds of thousands of people can be mobilised in ten minutes, and images get out there and influence political events quickly, as you notice not least from the developments in the Arab world. All these new trends, these emerging trends, are relevant for the Islamic world and particularly the migration issue. Look at Libya now, and Famagusta, look at European immigration policies and the political consequences of that immigration. Look at the information explosion, people out there in the streets, often in countries with very weak democratic traditions and their expectations to see results immediately, the frustration of not seeing results, and a new regime takes over. It is a day of, an age of, instant gratification, with both good and bad elements and implications.

So these are the trends, and of course I should bring back the point that I made on peace and security earlier, because one of these trends, this new sectarianism that divides people to religious or ethnic tribal groups, and where usually the “us” are on one level and the “them” on the other level. And once you have made that differentiation you are on a slippery slope of something that could turn very nasty. I would end by saying that in the United Nations, we will do everything we can. Of course you realise that in facing these issues I have mentioned, we are an important actor, a universal actor, a legitimate actor, but we are only one actor. We can only make a difference if there are enough nations supporting these values, enough nations working in that spirit, enough nations going in the direction I would love to see in the area of development and human rights and rule of law. But there are some interesting positive trends and I would even dare forecast that we will also have some promising, positive developments in the future, in the near future. On the development side I think this agenda, the sustainable development agenda, could be quite an important instrument and you will hopefully see it negotiated by September next year. It is very much up to the member states, but we will do our best to inspire them, and I am sure they feel the same obligation to produce the 2015 equivalent to the 2000 millennium development goals. In the area of peace and security there is an interesting debate going on which started with a proposal by the French government last fall when they, after the horrors we have seen in the past - Rwanda, Srebrenica, and now the threat of similar developments in Africa - they came up with a proposal that the veto power, which is of course very basic to the role and work of the United Nations Security Council, should not be used and applied in situations of mass crimes, mass atrocities. It is an interesting proposal when we cannot readily have Security Council reform, which we all know is very difficult to achieve. At least there could be a discussion about reduction of the use of the veto. And on the human rights front, I would say that the progress made on the international criminal court’s responsibility to protect, and Rights Up Front are signs that we are now putting human beings in the centre, and realise that that third pillar of the United Nations, human rights and rule of law, is as important as peace and security and development, that in fact they are intertwined and independent. Thank you very much.