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### **‘Global conflicts and human displacement: 21<sup>st</sup> Century challenges’**

Delivered by António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

*António Guterres became the 10th UN High Commissioner for Refugees on June 15, 2005.*

*Before joining UNHCR, High Commissioner Guterres spent more than 20 years in government and public service. He served as Portuguese prime minister from 1995 to 2002, during which time he was heavily involved in the international effort to resolve the crisis in East Timor. As president of the European Council in early 2000, he led the adoption of the so-called Lisbon Agenda and co-chaired the first European Union-Africa summit. He also founded the Portuguese Refugee Council in 1991 and was part of the Council of State of Portugal from 1991 to 2002.*

*From 1981 to 1983, he was a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, as well as chairman of the Committee on Demography, Migration and Refugees. In addition, he has been active in Socialist International, a worldwide organization of social democratic political parties. He was the group's vice-president from 1992 to 1999 and president from 1999 until mid-2005. He is a visiting professor at Lisbon's Instituto Superior Técnico.*

*High Commissioner Guterres spoke without written notes.*

Ladies and gentlemen, it's an enormous honour and pleasure to be here. I believe nobody can refuse an invitation of one good old friend, but what is absolutely impossible is not to accept an invitation from two good old friends. Both Sir John Holmes and Lord Robertson are good old friends. I'm enormously pleased to be here with both of you, but also delighted with the possibility to address such a distinguished audience.

We live in a dangerous world, and one of its symptoms is displacement. It is a symptom but is also a relevant indicator of broader humanitarian, social, economic, political and security problems of our times. We recently published the statistics of 2014, and at the end of last year we had 59.5 million people displaced by conflict in the world. Roughly two thirds were internally displaced, and one third refugees. Sometimes the internally displaced live much worse lives than refugees because their government, that is supposed to protect them, can be part of their problem.

This means an increase of 16% in relation to the year before, and an increase of 60% in relation to 10 years before. We should not forget when we see these big numbers that behind each refugee there is a tragic individual story; a story of suffering. Many of them have seen their houses destroyed, members of their family being killed, their communities bombarded. Many of them have lost everything. We have women who are victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence, and children who are victims of trauma which will probably never be solved in their lives.

But beyond that what is also amazing is the staggering escalation of forced displacement in the last few years. In 2010 there were 11,000 new people displaced by conflict per day; in 2011, 14,000; in 2012, 23,000; in 2013, 32,000; and in 2014, last year, 42,500 people displaced by conflict per day.

What this demonstrates is that clearly we live in a world in which the capacity to prevent conflicts and to resolve them in a timely fashion is practically non-existent. I remember when we had the Portuguese revolution in '74 and I started my visible political activity, in the Cold War, the bipolar world, obviously there was not a global governance system, and much less a democratic one, and even the two superpowers would sometimes get directly involved in conflicts, without much success; the Americans in Vietnam and the Russians in Afghanistan. But most of the conflicts were by proxy and I would say that the two would try to keep things under control, and the power relations were clear.

Then, when I was in government, it was the period of clear American supremacy, as Hubert Védrine called it at the time, the hyper-power. Again there was not a global governance system, much less a democratic one, but there were clear power relations. I remember that in the crisis of East Timor, after the referendum, there was a real risk of a massacre of East Timorese people. The problem was to convince the President of the United States that something had to be done, that an intervention was necessary.

The moment Bill Clinton was convinced that an intervention was necessary, he made a speech somewhere in the Pacific when he was going to New Zealand for an APEC summit. The moment he decided and said that an intervention was necessary everything happened. What was impossible the day before became necessary the next day. Indonesia accepted the intervention, Australia had the capacity to lead it, the Security Council met in an emergency session and unanimously voted in favour, and the East Timor crisis was solved.

If the East Timor crisis were to take place today, I doubt that anything similar would happen. Indeed now we live in a period in which we no longer have a unipolar or bipolar world, we don't even have a multipolar world; it's kind of a chaotic world where power relations became unclear. When power relations are unclear, impunity and unpredictability tend to prosper. That, I believe, is what we feel when we deal with the consequences of the high levels of displacement that are taking place in today's world.

On the other hand, as one looks at the nature of conflict it is also clear that the nature of conflict has evolved. We no longer have conflicts between two states, between a government and a rebel movement, or a religious or ethnic movement against the government. What we have more and more are situations in which there are national armies, international forces, different kinds of ethnic, religious or political militias and bandits all acting in the same areas. One can be a member of the militia in the morning and a bandit in the afternoon.

Which means that the conflicts themselves become more unpredictable, and it's becoming more and more difficult for humanitarian agencies to have access to the people caught up in them. On top of that I think it's fair to recognise that the human rights agenda has been losing ground to the national security agenda.

It means that governments feel increasingly free to do whatever they think they need to do in order to win the conflict in which they are involved, especially the internal conflicts in which they try to preserve the power they have. That also means not allowing humanitarian agencies to be present in some of the most critical areas. That means violations of international humanitarian law, which means of course civilians paying the price, the protection of civilians being very difficult to implement in those scenarios, and everything done with a high level of impunity. Even the international penal system, to a certain extent, we can see how difficult it is for it to move forward.

More and more pretexts are used in order not to allow for those principles which were so alive in the '90s, when I was in government; first the principle of humanitarian intervention,

then later the responsibility to protect, which the General Assembly of the United Nations approved. The truth is that today these are things that have very little possibility of being implemented anywhere in the world.

There are always excuses, namely for dictators, to use, either that humanitarian interventions sometimes hide agendas of a political nature, or that the West has double standards. They can go on and on with excuses of this kind. Let's be honest, some of these excuses sometimes have some basis, but the truth is that, in general, the human rights agenda is losing ground to the national sovereignty agenda, and that is making humanitarian work more and more difficult in several parts of the world, while making it easier to see human rights violated and the protection of civilians neglected.

In these circumstances it is important to recognise that the problems which we face, as humanitarian agencies, are increasing, and not only because of conflict. If one looks at the global mega-trends, population growth, climate change - and probably climate change is the defining problem of our times and the main accelerator of other trends in today's world - food insecurity, and water scarcity, the truth is that in a world that is smaller and smaller they are combining more and more, and enhancing each other with more devastating impacts. Natural disasters are becoming more frequent and more intense with worse humanitarian consequences. Desertification in several areas of the world is progressing more quickly.

When we see a big storm we cannot say that this is caused by climate change but it is clear that climate change has an important impact in making such things worse every single year. Obviously this is having a dramatic impact on human displacement, this time not displacement by conflict or persecution but displacement because people can no longer live in the places where their communities used to stay.

Unfortunately, while there is a very clear legal regime of protection of those fleeing conflict or persecution, international refugee law, and an organisation, my office, which is supposed to guarantee that the law is respected by member states of the United Nations, the truth is that, in relation to those who have to flee because of natural causes, they are not economic migrants. They are just people forced to move. If they are within the borders of their own country they are dependent on the capacity of their own government. Sometimes, to be honest, many make a huge effort in order to find solutions for them. But for those who also have to cross borders, there are very clear gaps in the protection regime which exists. They are treated as economic migrants and the only rights they have are the general human rights. They face situations, sometimes, where they see themselves stranded without adequate forms of protection.

Recently a number of countries, led by Norway, Switzerland, Germany, Costa Rica and Mexico, announced and launched an initiative to raise awareness about how to deal with these problems of displacement which are not caused by conflict or persecution. We hope that a first report will soon be published, but it is clear that the international community is not prepared to adopt any kind of new legal framework in relation to this kind of displacement, not even probably forms of soft law like the guidelines that were approved, I believe in your time, Sir John Holmes, in relation to internal displacement.

So very probably there will not be much progress beyond the awareness that is raised and the forms of international cooperation that can be established, and this is one of the present dramas that we have, that not only is displacement growing, not only are the causes of displacement multiplying, but we have more and more difficulties to find solutions for the people displaced.

If one looks at today's world, and coming back to conflict, we have, first of all, a multiplication of new conflicts. We have, since 18 months or so the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Iraq, the Ukraine, the aggravation of Libya, Yemen, Burundi and I could probably go on.

At the same time, we have a mega-crisis, the Syria-Iraq crisis, with 15 million people displaced – 4 million Syrian refugees, 7.6 million people displaced inside Syria, 3 million people displaced inside Iraq – a mega-crisis without any light at the end of the tunnel.

At the same time we have the old crises that never die: Afghanistan since the 70s; Somalia since the '80s. The Democratic Republic of Congo since forever, but probably more dramatically since the '90s. There seems to be no solution.

When I came to UNHCR 10 years ago, we were helping about 1 million people per year go back home. It was the period in which there was the end of the conflict in Sierra Leone and the UK was quite strongly involved in it. In Liberia, in Angola, on several other fronts. Now, there is no end of any conflict anywhere. So last year we only helped 126,000 people go back home in safety and dignity. From 1,000,000 to 100,000 – this shows how difficult it is to find solutions.

Again, the question is: "How is it possible to end a conflict in today's world?" Power relations are unclear; there is no global governance system; and even in each of the contexts it is practically impossible to find: one, an honest broker; second, the capacity to join at the same table, or at least bring together, those countries that have an influence in relation to the conflict that is taking place.

Looking at Syria today, it is clear that the parties to the conflict will never come to an agreement, in my perspective. We can have Geneva one, two, three, four, five, six – there will never be an agreement between the parties to the conflict as they are. But the truth is that they can only maintain the conflict because they have support: financial support, political support, and weapons support.

Now, if it would be possible, those that have an influence on the parties to the conflict – and I would say that probably the key five countries would be the US, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey – need to understand that this is a war in which nobody is winning, in which everybody is losing, that became not only a tragedy for the Syrian people, but a huge factor of destabilisation of the region; Iraq is already engulfed by the same war; Lebanon in a very fragile situation; even Jordan and Turkey with impacts that can be rather difficult to manage.

At the same time, fighters from all over the world are there and they will go back to their countries of origin and they will be a threat. So there is today, because of the Syrian-Iraqi conflict, a clear threat to global peace and security and in particular to the countries of the region from where the largest number of foreign fighters came.

So it looks like it would make sense to be able to have the leadership to gather these countries and to say, "Let's put an end to this nonsense". The truth is that the leadership doesn't exist and the capacity to bring these countries together apparently doesn't exist, and we seem to be condemned to go on and on and on with a conflict that never ends and with levels of suffering that are absolutely impossible to accept.

Then if one looks at another kind of conflict: South Sudan. In South Sudan it seems much simpler. Basically, we have two people: the president and the leader of the opposition, Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, and their entourages. There are no essential political questions; it's a matter of a struggle for power.

It is true that one of them has the support of Uganda and then, if that is the case, the other would have some support from Sudan. But it's not a global conflict; it's not a global threat. It looks like it should be simple to solve, but it goes on and on and on with a level of suffering for the South Sudanese people that is absolutely unacceptable, especially taking into account that, just five years ago, they have emerged as an independent country with lots of hopes for everybody, especially for them, and with a strong commitment by the international community to make it happen.

Why, when it was possible in the past to solve Sierra Leone, to solve Liberia, to solve Angola, does it today seem impossible to solve Burundi, to solve South Sudan. If one looks at Syria and Iraq, obviously much worse, there is indeed a dramatic lack of capacity to prevent conflicts and to solve them.

This is creating a situation in which the humanitarian multi-lateral response system is not broken. I believe it is even a substantially effective system, to a large extent thanks to the reforms that Sir John Holmes, when he was Emergency Relief Coordinator and the UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, has introduced. But whilst not broken, it is financially broke. We no longer have the resources and the capacity to respond at a minimum level to the needs of protection and assistance that these displaced populations require.

This is a dramatic problem at the present moment. The most obvious example, I'm sure you noticed, is that the World Food Programme has announced dramatic reductions, 40%, 50%, and in one of the situations, Mauritania, 100% of the food support given to both refugees and other vulnerable communities in different parts of the world. Of course, food support is the most basic of the forms of assistance that can be provided.

The system is indeed now facing a situation in which we are not responding to the most basic needs of populations in distress around the world.

Now, what can be done? Obviously, the best would be to recreate the capacity to prevent conflicts and to solve them, and at the same time to be able to effectively mobilise the international community in relation to climate change and the other dimensions that are also, even with a different nature, causes of displacement in the world.

I must say I'm not very optimistic about that capacity to improve the prevention and the resolution of conflicts in the near future. I think things will even get worse before they might eventually get better. Some people have the hope that the present phase of transition will lead to some form of a multi-polar organisation of the world, with some kind of multi-lateral governance. Others think that the chaos is just the new stage, not a transition, but the new form of organisation of international relations for the time to come.

In any case, I am not expecting any substantial improvement in the global capacity to prevent and solve conflicts. Which increases the responsibility of the international community to be able to respond to those crises, and especially from the humanitarian point of view.

Now, there are things that can be done. Several donors have increased their contributions; there has been a lot of effort to bring in new donors from the gulf countries. South Korea is another example. There is an increased support from areas of the private sector. There is an effort to introduce forms of innovation to increase effectiveness and efficiency with cash instead of other forms of support, which is much easier and much less expensive; with the use of mobile technologies; with the use of new forms of energy, etc.

So a lot has been done and is being done and needs to be enhanced in order to improve the situation, but I think we need to think out of the box and to find some new forms to address this question. Because if not, I believe we are condemned not only to see things getting worse, but not to be able to respond to them in a more effective way.

The first idea that I would like to put on the table is in relation to the links between humanitarian aid and development cooperation. There is traditionally a discussion about the gap between relief and development. The idea is that usually humanitarian agencies come first with humanitarian aid and then as the situation stabilises, development actors can come and guarantee the sustainability of the solutions that are found.

But there has always been, because there are different cultures, different senses of urgency, a gap between these two forms of international action. I think that the problem is no longer how to address the gap; the problem is how to make sure that the two things act in a combined way from the very beginning of a crisis.

If one looks, for instance, at the situation in the countries around Syria, it is clear that the problem is not only a problem of giving humanitarian aid to refugees: it's a problem of supporting the resilience of local communities and supporting the efforts by the governments to address the structural impacts of the Syria crisis, in their economies and their societies.

Lebanon has now one-third of its population which is Syrian. Jordan has a dramatic impact also on its economy and society. Can you imagine what it is to have schools all of a sudden completely overburdened? Health systems unable to respond to huge demographic increases? Water and electricity, vital in these two countries, failing dramatically? It is clear that we need, both for the support of those communities, but also as an instrument to create the conditions for solutions – when those solutions are possible – we need to have development actors side-by-side with humanitarian actors from the beginning of a crisis.

But for that there are some strategic issues that need to be put on the table. Some of the countries I mentioned – Jordan and Lebanon, near Syria, but also Kenya, near Somalia, or Cameroon, near Nigeria – these countries are middle-income countries, and because they are middle-income countries they are not considered eligible for many of the development cooperation programmes except, for instance for Jordan, from the United States and some other donors, for geo-strategic reasons. But the large majority are not a priority of both bilateral and multi-lateral donors. Even some instruments are not available for them. The World Bank cannot give grants to middle-income countries.

So I feel that not only do we need to be able to look into humanitarian and development aid in a combined way, but we also need – from the political perspective – to look into those two together with the security question. It is clear that countries like the ones I mentioned – Jordan, Lebanon, Kenya, or Cameroon – are not only large recipients of refugees, are not only essential pillars of stability of their region, with the risk of a domino effect that can contaminate them, but they have also become the first line of defence of collective security.

So I believe that if these things are seen in a combined way, development cooperation policies need to be revised and priorities and strategies need to be re-thought in order to make sure that countries like the ones I mentioned become countries in the first line of priority of development cooperation policies of all actors, and that the obstacles to some forms of cooperation are removed.

This is an issue that I think can only be solved with political leadership from the top, at G7, G20 level, at the level of the boards of the World Bank or the IMF. I have to say that there is now an excellent evolution in the World Bank fully understanding these questions, cooperating in a fantastic way with us, both in the surroundings of Syria and in three areas of Africa, and fully understanding that it is absolutely crucial to support those critical areas that are vital for regional stability and global peace and security.

This is a question that will, as I said, require political leadership from the highest level because the tradition and the way bureaucracies will attempt to look into it will not allow for these things to move in the right direction.

What we witness is the difficulty for those that have to define development cooperation strategies to combine these three perspectives – humanitarian, development, and security. At the same time, a wrong answer is given – namely within the UN system – in which instead of looking into these things from the strategic point of view, they are looked at from the operational point of view. We have today in the UN a trend for the so-called 'structural integration of UN missions', with the idea, where you have a peacekeeping mission, to have a structural integration of the peacekeeping mission with the different UN agencies, including humanitarian agencies that are on the ground.

The problem is that many peacekeepers today have no peace to keep, and when they have no peace to keep they become parties to the conflict, and when they become parties to the conflict it's very difficult for those that act, based on the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, and of independence, to do it if they are structurally integrated within the mission.

So we need much more strategic conversations about objectives related to humanitarian development and security, but at the same time we need to have the wisdom to understand that when we operate on the ground we need to maintain the independence of the humanitarian space, and to guarantee that humanitarian actors can do so respecting the humanitarian principles of impartiality, independence, and neutrality.

I would also like to say something about Europe and the present migration and refugee flows.

All humanitarian aid in the world is done on a voluntary basis. All humanitarian agencies, NGOs, Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies, UN agencies, are supported based on voluntary contributions. Peacekeeping is supported based on assessed contributions.

I have been strongly supporting the idea that we should have, for major emergencies – the so-called 'Level Three' emergencies – at least part of its funding through assessed contributions, and my suggestion was the creation of a super CERF (the CERF is the Central Emergency Response Fund managed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs that Sir John used to lead). I think we would need at least part of these major emergencies to be funded based on assessed contributions, like peacekeeping, and not only on voluntary contributions.

I'm not very hopeful about this idea, moving forward, because several key countries in the General Assembly of the United Nations will be against it. I think this increases the importance of linking more closely development cooperation and humanitarian aid, as humanitarian aid is only 16% of development cooperation budgets in the world.

Now, just a few words about Europe in this context.

I believe the day before yesterday we have reached 150,000 people coming to Europe by boat. 150,000 people seems – and it is – a meaningful number, but let's not forget that we

have today 4 million Syrian refugees, just Syrian refugees, and that a country like Lebanon has one-third of its population, as I mentioned, Syrian or Palestinian.

But in any case, it is an important challenge for Europe. Last year Europe had about 600,000 asylum requests. This corresponds more-or-less to 1 per 1000 of the European Union population. Now, think about an island with 1000 people, and if one person comes to that island, we cannot say that the island has not the capacity to absorb that person.

So the first thing we should have is a sense of proportion of what we are discussing. It's a huge challenge for Europe, it's a meaningful movement of people, but it is not something comparable with the impacts that countries like Lebanon or Turkey or Jordan or Cameroon or Ethiopia or Kenya are having at the present moment. We need to avoid the kind of schizophrenic discussion that sometimes exists in Europe, namely about migration.

The problem is that we are now witnessing a movement within this displacement into Europe. It started essentially in the Central Mediterranean, and I would say it started with the majority of people moving because of economic reasons; it was essentially a migration movement with some refugees, as I mentioned, in the Central Mediterranean. Of course we have seen the marine rescues of last year and then all the difficulties of the beginning of the year, but finally I believe the European Union has increased its capacity to rescue at sea. Now lives are being saved in a much more effective way, and that was for us a first priority in any circumstance.

But things are shifting. The arrivals in Greece are now bigger than the arrivals in Italy, and even if we count from the beginning of the year until now, the majority of the 150,000 already came to Greece. Greece has no capacity at all, either of reception or of integration of people at the present moment. The reception system of Greece has 1100 spaces. Last weekend, 1900 people came to Greece. This gives you an idea of the chaos that exists at the present moment in Greece in relation to the arrivals in the European Union.

Obviously in this situation, and with the worsening of the living conditions of Syrians in the neighbouring countries, 65% of the arrivals to Greece are already Syrians and 85% are from conflict countries, which means that what we are witnessing is less and less of a migration movement and more and more progressively a refugee movement. Which of course highlights all the obligations that Europe has in relation to international refugee law and in relation to the European legislation in itself.

The drama is that people coming to Greece then tend to move onwards. The borders are with Bulgaria, and as you know Bulgaria has had all the difficulties and problems that are well-known, and there is kind of a fence at the Bulgarian border, then the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia that also has the vulnerabilities that are known. The next is Serbia and the next is Hungary which has just announced the creation of a wall and a certain number of other very restrictive measures.

Which means that we are going to see, in the months to come, a very complex problem of movements of people from Turkey to Greece and through the Western Balkans, for which I believe Europe needs to be prepared, and Europe needs to have a comprehensive response.

Now, there has been some progress; I just came from Luxembourg, from the Council of Justice and Home Affairs. There has been some progress, but the progress that was made until now is, I think, quite out of proportion in relation to the challenges that the continent is facing.

I think we need a European approach, and a comprehensive European approach. First of all, rescue at sea needs to be maintained; saving lives remains a key humanitarian objective that cannot be denied. At the same time, we need to massively support Italy, Greece, and the countries in transit – in between – in order for them to be able to offer proper conditions of reception and proper conditions of integration in their societies, or at least of transit in a humane perspective.

But we also need to do a number of other things. It's essential to crack down more effectively on smugglers and traffickers, and what we have been doing until now is not enough. But cracking down on smugglers and traffickers can only be effective if at the same time we create more legal avenues to come into Europe, especially for people in need of protection. That is related to resettlement opportunities; that is linked to humanitarian admissions, and obviously two countries in Europe have had the biggest burden on that: Germany and Sweden.

Germany and Sweden received last year 43% of the asylum requests in Europe. There is no fair distribution of the situation within the European Union. We need more legal avenues also in visa policies, in family reunification programmes, and at the same time we need to make sure that a mechanism of responsibility and solidarity is created.

Why responsibility? Because the countries where people arrive sometimes have an easy solution, which is not to register them, not to fingerprint them, and just let them move. This has happened, let's be clear, in Italy and in Greece. So it is clear that the countries where people enter Europe need to abide by the *acquis communautaire*, and need to make sure that people are properly registered and people are adequately fingerprinted, and that obviously those that request for asylum have an opportunity to do so. Those that are not in need of protection, there is a right for return to their countries of origin if there is no protection concern.

But at the same time we need to recognise that the countries of entry have not the capacity to deal with such a huge problem. We need to have an effective mechanism of solidarity within the European Union. The relocation proposed that was presented was only for 40,000, and was also on a voluntary basis.

Now, I think that if one looks at the perspective that we are facing, and the risk of increased flows in the near future, I think it would be very important for there to be a more comprehensive European response which means that these principles of responsibility and solidarity would need to be strongly enhanced by all European countries, because with 28 countries responding together it would be relatively easy to be effective.

Finally, it would be very important also to address root causes. We know that the root causes in relation to the prevention of conflict are difficult, but at least in development cooperation policies a lot can be done. European development cooperation very rarely takes into account human mobility. Spain has been quite successful with its policy in relation to Western Africa, in which a lot of things have been done in order to create the conditions for the populations there to have conditions to stay and not to be forced to move. But in general development cooperation doesn't take into account human mobility or the prevention of displacement.

I think that it would be very important to look seriously into what Europe is doing in countries of origin, countries of first asylum, and countries of transit, in order to increase there the capacity to absorb populations in distress, to give them opportunities, and to be able to reduce the flows.

Having said this, it is clear that in relation to conflict situations the respect for the protection instruments that international law has established will also need to be maintained and Europe needs to remain a continent of asylum.

It is my belief that this will happen. There are some distressing indications of rising xenophobia in some societies and more and more difficulties for societies to understand the values of tolerance, of diversity, and of the fact that societies will become multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious. But at the same time I also see a lot of very dedicated organisations in civil societies, and several political leaders in different European countries, that are strongly committed to make sure that Europe remains a continent of asylum, and that Europe can have a comprehensive approach to this problem based on a common responsibility, but also a common solidarity.

Thank you very much.

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