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“Lessons from the Field for the United Nations’ Sustaining Peace Agenda”

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as presented at the scoping dialogue on

**Regional Dialogues on Sustaining Peace:
Shaping UN Strategies for 2018 and Beyond**

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Your Excellency and Distinguished Colleagues and Experts. As shared during the opening session, my institute in Abuja, the Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy, and Development, is delighted to partner with Her Excellency Ambassador Al-Thani and the Qatari Mission to the UN, as well as our friends at the Stimson Center, on today’s program, in support of regional dialogues later this year that seek to provide fresh ideas and contribute to building a worldwide constituency for the United Nations’ still nascent “sustaining peace” agenda.

Given the untold human suffering and material destruction from ongoing wars and often senseless violence in, for example, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Ukraine, few issues remain as critical on the global agenda today. And indeed, it is only through collaborative, multi-stakeholder approaches that harness the creativity and resources of diverse state and non-state actors that today’s deadly conflicts can be managed and the root causes of these conflicts can eventually and comprehensively be addressed. Indeed, this is precisely why the upcoming regional dialogues – that engage diverse peacebuilding actors from within civil society, the research and business communities, governments, and the United Nations – are so timely and critical.

In my remarks this afternoon, I wish to share with you my professional and personal observations about the role of the United Nations in peacebuilding, in the hope of helping to further stimulate our discussions this afternoon and during the regional dialogues in the months ahead on the UN’s emerging sustaining peace agenda.

I. Setting the Stage: Contextual Factors facing the UN's Sustaining Peace Agenda

First, I wish to briefly set the context in which UN peacebuilding is currently undertaken.

Despite two World Wars and untold human suffering, during the 20th century humanity witnessed an unparalleled advance of freedom and justice with the defeat of fascism, the demise of other forms of totalitarian government, the de-legitimation of colonialism, the dismantling of Apartheid, and the spread of democratic governance and respect for human rights. In the past two decades, the world has also managed to reduce extreme global poverty by half, and to harness a range of new technologies in agriculture, communications, transport and health – the sum total of which makes our interconnected global economy possible.

On the other hand, in some parts of the world, populations growing faster than economies can create new tensions, and the concentration and diversion of wealth have left millions destitute and frustrated, contributing to militant extremism, not just in poorly governed spaces, where state institutions and the rule of law have collapsed, but among those poorly served by or unable to fit into their adopted states. According to a recent Global Peace Index finding, political terrorism is at an all-time high, battle deaths — *fueled, in particular, by conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa* — are at a 25-year high, and the number of refugees and displaced people is at a level not seen since the end of the second World War.

We can choose to manage our global affairs, in the face of such challenges and risks, in a manner that lends itself to *greater peace, fairness, and equal opportunities for all nations and their citizens*, or allow our global governance structures and mechanisms to *decay further and fail to match* the scale and complexity of present day challenges and threats.

II. Personal Insights and Recommendations for the UN's Sustaining Peace Agenda

Through the deliberations ahead in the run-up to next year's General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, it is my personal hope that the emphasis will be on the creation of better tools, institutions, norms, and networks to avoid further catastrophic violence and to build a better future. What we need most are new kinds of public, private, and mixed approaches to global peacebuilding designed to meet and master the challenges and threats and open-up opportunities –especially for fragile and conflict-affected countries – to thrive with justice, security, and dignity.

In recent years, multiple and recurring intrastate conflicts, exploited by international terrorist and criminal organizations, have reversed the declining trends in armed violence witnessed since the end of the Cold War. At the same time, the growing roles of women, civil society organizations, and businesses, whose voices are amplified through new communications technologies, offer new opportunities for effective peacebuilding, governance renewal, and transformational justice.

Drawing on my first-hand experience from decades of service both “from the field” and at headquarters with the United Nations, I wish now to make six sets of recommendations in response to challenges at the heart of the UN’s new sustaining peace agenda.

- First, the United Nations is in urgent need of **greater conflict mediation capacities**, beginning with a cadre senior mediators and Special Envoys of the Secretary-General, who would be on call to serve as the senior echelon of a larger professional civilian capacity for UN mediation efforts and field missions. While I am proud to have overseen the establishment of DPA’s Mediation Support Unit in 2005, and it is encouraging to see demand for its services growing, fundamental peacemaking and preventive diplomacy skills must be a central recruitment criteria, buttressed through regular state-of-the-art training opportunities, for all senior-level UN staff deployed to the field. Such a targeted and cost-effective investment will also go a considerable way toward *operationalizing* the Secretary-General’s laudable emphasis on “preventive action” as a central plank of the UN sustaining peace agenda.
- Second, greater **inclusion and participation of women** at all levels and all stages of peace processes, especially as senior mediators and Envoys, should be a primary goal of the UN sustaining peace agenda. Unless the difficult economic, social and security burdens borne by women in conflict-affected environments are reduced significantly, it is hard to see how the effects of conflict can be said to have been reduced. And it is hard to see how those burdens can be effectively reduced without the significant participation of women in their resolution. I am pleased to note that we will delve further on these issues in our next session this afternoon.
- Third, the **Responsibility to Rebuild** should be viewed as just as important as the Responsibility to Prevent and to Protect, and here I recommend sufficient investments in capabilities — and pairing these with the development of concrete and coordinated goals and actions plans — for all actors seeking to rebuild in countries where mass atrocities have been committed. For example, when I led the hybrid UN-African Union Mission in Darfur — *the largest UN peace operation at the time with 27,000 peacekeepers and an annual budget of \$1.7 billion* — I was surprised and dismayed when I learned that I could allocate only *\$4 million of this massive budget*, via “Quick Impact Projects,” toward anything that would help the African Union and United Nations address the root causes of conflict in war-torn western Sudan. As decades of UN peacebuilding experience clearly shows us – and now, fortunately, reflected too in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development – achieving sustainable peace requires an equal emphasis on support for development and governance writ large, not simply narrow security responses.
- Fourth, **far greater coordination with regional actors and local civil society** is needed urgently. Returning for a second to my experience in Darfur: admittedly,

the hybrid UN-AU peace operation led to many unforeseen challenges in terms of coordination and higher transactions costs. But the benefits of increased burden-sharing and increased capabilities for peacekeeping outweighed, in my view, the difficulties inherent in such as large-scale, joint undertaking in a high-risk environment such as Darfur. The combined effort also lent greater legitimacy to this external operation in the eyes of important local actors and, arguably, helped to build critical new conflict management capacities and cultural sensitivity within both the AU and UN. One advantage of our sustaining peace regional dialogues in the months ahead will be to explore, directly with important regional organization and civil society partners in Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere, new opportunities for enhanced UN-regional collaboration.

- A fifth UN peacebuilding-related idea has to do with the **UN Peacebuilding Architecture**, established a little more than one decade ago to prevent the *recurrence* of deadly conflict in fragile states and regions. Taking to heart the Secretary-General's recent Call to Action to also focus political attention and resources on the *initial outbreak of conflict* – and learning from the UN Human Rights Council's successful Universal Periodic Review mechanism – I wish to recommend consideration of the idea of “**peacebuilding audits**”. This new tool could transform the Peacebuilding Commission by equipping it with an effective new instrument for early warning, by analyzing trends and periodically recommending to the General Assembly and Security Council appropriate actions to reduce the likelihood of deadly violence in a vulnerable country or region.
- Sixth and finally, I wish to remind this esteemed group of the prevention and peacebuilding roles of the International Courts in The Hague and the good that might be achieved, for example, by expanding acceptance of the jurisdiction of the **International Court of Justice** and making use of its authoritative advisory opinions in innovative ways. In addition, a new protocol is needed that could guide the UN Security Council when it deliberates on the referral of a situation to the **International Criminal Court**.

III. Sustainable Development Goal #16 and Conclusion

Before concluding my remarks, I wish to share a few reflections on the importance of Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peaceful, just, and inclusive societies toward advancing the UN's global peacebuilding and sustaining peace agenda. From my perspective, Goal #16 provides the foundations for achieving all of the other SDGs. For without putting in place peace and good democratic governance based on the rule of law, societies of all shapes and sizes cannot achieve broad-based and sustainable development.

Goal 16 supports the new UN sustaining peace agenda by helping countries examine the root causes of protracted violent conflict, and by advocating for innovative approaches to international peacebuilding. Indeed, in my time with the United Nations, I pursued

similar kinds of innovations when, for example, the UN-African Union hybrid mission in Darfur diverted staff and material resources and considerable high-level political attention to finding better and more equitable ways to manage the critical and scarce resource of water, very much at the heart of the region's conflict.

As I also witnessed first-hand in international efforts to facilitate peace processes in Angola, Myanmar, and elsewhere, without *concrete, time-bound, and measurable benchmarks or targets*, assessed through associated qualitative and, where possible, quantitative indicators, key actors essential to building durable peace and effective governance cannot be held to account. Equally important is how reporting on Goal 16's targets, at next week's HLPF and in the coming years, will soon reveal the comparative, positive advantages of myriad actors in their specific contributions toward sustainable peace and justice ... in other words, the same "collaborative approach to peacebuilding" that is at the heart of our discussions here today and, I hope too, in our regional multi-stakeholder dialogues on sustaining peace in the months ahead.

Thank you and I welcome your thoughts and questions.