

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS AT SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Tehran, 30 August 2012

It is a great pleasure for me to have this opportunity of addressing a very distinguished group of professors and particularly young people.

I thought that most of the audience would be young people. I now realise that this is a mixture of distinct scholars.

As the Secretary-General of the United Nations, I have been addressing many different groups of people. Do you know who would be the most difficult group of people to speak to? These are the group of professors. What can I say to the professors who are teaching? I was taught and educated by professors.

So you are the eminent professors in every aspect of studies, and I really hope that this opportunity briefly maybe will give us, some opportunity of addressing the issues of our common concern, common interests for the future of young generation and particularly, since you are going through a very important transition toward a greater democracy [and] social and economic development, while you have to address many challenges.

This is a basic purpose - normally, whenever I visit, wherever I visit some countries, I normally meet the presidents, prime ministers, [and] foreign ministers, so the agenda are more or less fixed. We always talk about international peace, regional conflicts, or development issues, or human rights issues. But from them, I take more or less fixed positions which I have and they have their fixed positions. But I want to have some inspiring ideas and good ideas from young people and also some professors who would have some good professional visions for the United Nations, the Iranian government and people who could work together.

As you know, I am visiting Iran for the first time as the Secretary-General of the United Nations. This is a great opportunity for me to participate in the Non-Aligned [Movement] summit meeting, and I sincerely congratulated the leadership of the Iranian government. This will provide a good opportunity for them to raise their political profile in the international community, and also demonstrate their moderate and constructive leadership in the international community.

I really wanted to speak with you about your path as a country, your place in the family of nations and your potential for the future, because I believe in this country's future.

My first relationship with Iran dates back to 1974. I stayed here in Tehran for about forty days as a young diplomat. I know, some, but I couldn't recognize anything, because there was a huge change. I never saw, at that time, such huge high-rises and apartments. It has become a very

crowded but vibrant society.

Then after that, as Vice-Minister I visited here in 2000. And this is my third visit, but the first visit as the Secretary-General, this is quite meaningful.

As I said, I really wish to have this kind of meeting in a café or some other places rather than this fixed venue, but I would like to have some broader exchange of views

Let me begin by expressing my deep sadness for all of the victims caused by the recent earthquake in the north-western part of Iran. I express my condolences. My Resident Coordinator and the disaster risk reduction experts have visited the site of the earthquake. The United Nations stands ready to help your people, as always.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me just tell you frankly. Many people when I decided to come just advised me, “why are you going there? That country has a lot of problems, why don’t you just stop?” But I thought that, you know, as the Secretary-General, believing in the power of engagement, power of diplomacy, I thought that I have the responsibility to visit any Member State of the United Nations.

And, moreover, this meeting of the Non-Aligned [Movement] summit meeting where 120 countries are participating, this is a great opportunity for me to engage not only Iranian people but also many other leaders here. In fact, I have been meeting many people and tomorrow I am also going to meet many leaders.

I believe in stating concerns directly and finding peaceful solutions to even the most difficult challenges.

I believe in the values of the United Nations.

That is why I am here, and I am very much appreciated by Iranian people and the Government leadership, and also by members of the Non-Aligned Movement. That makes me happy to be here.

I have also a strong sense that the people of Iran know what kind of society they wish to build. I wanted to come and encourage you, to know what are your aspirations and how the United Nations can work together.

I very much welcome to see for myself directly, personally, a country that figures prominently in the global awareness.

Persian cultural and artistic traditions have enriched humanity for centuries – many hundreds and thousands of years. Your poetry is unrivalled in its imagery and depth of feeling. In fact, yesterday my Resident Coordinator, Ms. [Consuelo] Vidal was telling me how much she was impressed by this artistic language of Persian. Persian language itself is a poem, so whoever or

whenever you speak the Persian language, it sounds and looks like poems. I agree with that. Your architectural wonders have filled people with awe - from the explorers of old to travellers today.

Iranians are rightly proud of these achievements.

As one of our founding members of the United Nations, Iran also has a long history with the United Nations. Through the years, we have worked together on many issues of concern. And I am just impressed that one of your institutes has 350 years of history, and one of your institutes has 120 years of history, pretty a tradition of academy.

Today, we look out upon a global landscape full of challenges. A prolonged economic crisis worldwide, a jobs crisis, climate change, a rising tide of intolerance.

One thread runs through whatever solutions lie ahead: the need for more effective international cooperation.

We need every country to see the national interest in the global interest. When national leaders and peoples only talk and care [for] their national interests, you cannot expect that the international community will be able to have harmonious development and prosperity. We need every country to put its best face forward for global concern and global prosperity.

Here in Iran, poverty and maternal mortality are down – that's good. Literacy for girls is up. Women now make up more than half of all university [students] in Iran – that's again fantastic. This welcome trend must continue with women entering an ever-broader range of professions and fields of study. We'll discuss this matter through an exchange of views, but there are many areas that we have to do more when it comes to women.

In a larger sense, I believe Iran would benefit from fully drawing on the activism of civil society.

Of course, unleashing the potential of civil society means accepting its diversity of views, even when these views might seem challenging to authorities. Social activism and critics should never be conflated with national security and seen as a threat to the society or the state.

I have grown up in a country where all this democratic transition has formed through a very turbulent period. We were, at least, under the military dictatorship, thoroughly [for] two years, but before and after even, there were a lot of social and political turbulences. The excuses of all politicians and critics were that this is not beneficial for national security. So they always tried to identify the causes of social, civil society with the national security priorities. I think it should not be conflicted with the national security.

I know that the state of the economy is at the forefront of concerns; rising prices, declining economic opportunity, a lack of jobs. I know this is hitting young people particularly hard.

Expanding opportunities for youth is a generational imperative.

This is especially true in a place like Iran, which has one of the youngest populations in the world, with more than 60 per cent of the population under the age of 30. So you are very young people, on average.

You are also a highly networked society. Well over half of your population uses the Internet, again, led by young people.

With freedom and space, Iran's young people can be a primary engine for driving your country's progress and standing.

Distinguished professors,
Young leaders,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In order to build a future of opportunity and hope for all of the people of Iran, important issues must be addressed and universal values upheld.

The United Nations and the international community are fully behind the people of Iran in your long struggle for democracy and human rights.

The first human rights charter was developed by Cyrus 2,500 years ago. This something to be very commendable and you should be very proud of.

Today, Iranian scholarship and Islam itself offer a rich and pluralist tradition of interpretation and application of the law, and I encourage Iran to allow greater space for different and divergent perspectives to play out in public debate.

Many other countries with strong Islamic traditions have in this way found a path to complying with international standards, for instance on the use of corporal punishment or the death penalty, while remaining true to their Islamic identity and values.

I welcome the efforts by Iran's judiciary to prevent the execution of juvenile offenders. But, I encourage further steps to restrict and even abolish the death penalty in law and practice.

Many other human rights challenges remain, civil and political rights, due process, and discrimination against women and minorities.

Restricting freedom of expression and suppressing social activism will only set back development and plant the seeds of instability.

It is especially important for the voices of Iran's people to be heard during next year's presidential election.

That is why I have urged the authorities during my visit this time to release opposition leaders, human rights defenders, journalists and social activists to create the conditions for free

expression and open debate.

I also urge Iran to strengthen cooperation with the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations, in particular the Special Rapporteur. I have discussed this matter with your leadership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serious questions also persist over nuclear issues.

It is in Iran's interest to take concrete steps to build international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear programme.

That is why I urge Iran to uphold its responsibilities as a UN Member State and party to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, NPT, and to comply with relevant Security Council resolutions.

And I urge all parties in the region to recognize the need to resolve this situation through diplomatic and peaceful means. This is what I discussed with Dr. [Ali Ardashir] Larijani, and also Foreign Minister [Ali Akbar] Salehi yesterday and also today. They both assured me that they are optimistic about the prospect of negotiation.

Provocative and inflammatory remarks and threats should be avoided by all means and all parties.

Under the Charter of the United Nations, all Member States have a clear obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any other State.

Every country has a responsibility to exercise maximum restraint and to refrain from any hostile behavior that could inflame tensions and further complicate the search for peace.

Let us remember that it was Iran itself, 38 years ago, you have proposed the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

Efforts that would lead to a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction are already under way. I have appointed a special envoy, and he is now working very hard to convene this meeting before the end of this month. This represents a unique opportunity for all States in the region to constructively address common security problems on an equal level.

This is clearly in the interests of all States and a goal well worth pursuing.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe we can make progress on all of these challenges and more.

Our collective responsibility is to build bridges of mutual understanding. This is the very heart of the Alliance of Civilizations, which is an initiative by the United Nations, an initiative inspired by Iran itself through dialogue among civilizations. This is what your country has proposed. All nations should be true to that higher calling.

I remember that when I was working as the Chief of Staff to the President of the General Assembly in 2001 and 2002 – this was right after September 11th – this dialogue among civilizations was convened in the General Assembly. And it was a very important, meaningful, and constructive meeting of the General Assembly at that time, right after September 11th.

As you know, this is another issue; the UN General Assembly has condemned Holocaust denial. Anti-Semitism has no place in the 21st century. Likewise, Islamophobia, a new word for an old phenomenon, is equally defamatory.

When leaders or ordinary people utter such sentiments, it is they who are diminished. When academic institutions or think tanks lend their support to pseudo-scholarship, they are betraying their own principles.

Distinguished professors,
Young leaders,
Ladies and gentlemen,

My purpose today is to highlight the cost of Iran's current trajectory, both at home and in the international arena.

Any country at odds with the international community is one that denies itself much-needed investment and finds itself isolated from the thrust of common progress.

Any country at odds with itself deprives itself of its people's energy and goodwill, and sets the stage for future instability.

I understand that Iran has suffered at the hands of external actors. You went through a terrible war with your neighbor. You have felt unduly singled out.

But I also know that you can overcome the current difficulties and build a better future.

At the entrance of the United Nations there is a magnificent carpet – I think the largest carpet the United Nations has – that adorns the wall of the United Nations, a gift from the people of Iran. Alongside it are the wonderful words of that great Persian poet, Sa'adi. I quote:

“All human beings are members of one frame,
Since all, at first, from the same essence came.
When time afflicts a limb with pain
The other limbs at rest cannot remain.
If thou feel not for other's misery
A human being is no name for thee.”

End of quote:

This wise counsel is as relevant today as when it was written nearly 800 years ago.

One thing I am very proud of is that the Iranian Government has been making a tradition to provide very nice woven carpet portraits of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations, starting from Trygve Lie, the first Secretary-General, up to me. And I always feel very proud whenever I see this portrait of myself; it looks much more handsome than I am. And I really thank you for that nice gift. It's not to me but to the United Nations. It will be there as long as the United Nations exists, and I thank you very much.

Again if I may quote this poet Sa'adi's words, those words motivate me to stand alongside all those here seeking more justice, more opportunity, and a greater say in shaping their own destiny.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us all, most of all, make constructive contributions to global problem-solving at a time of such profound challenge and change. Thank you very much for your attention. Thank you.