The Secretary General

Remarks at the event: Leadership Matters - Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi in the Contemporary World

Your Excellency Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and a great honour to be here to mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, one of the giants of the 20th century, a global icon of peace and an advocate for the most vulnerable. I thank Prime Minister Modi and the Indian mission for convening this meeting.

Gandhiji’s vision and philosophy are pillars of the work of the United Nations.

Part of his genius lay in his ability to see the interconnectedness and the unity between all things. His political achievements included leading the movement that ended colonial rule in India, using peace, love and integrity to prevail. But his vision went far beyond politics to encompass human rights and sustainable development.

Gandhi promoted non-violence not just as a philosophy and a political strategy, but as a means to achieve justice and change. Indeed, many of his ideas foreshadow the holistic thinking behind the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To take just one example: Gandhi understood the importance of advocacy and action around the issue of sanitation and led campaigns for clean drinking water and hygienic facilities when this issue was still deeply taboo.

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Gandhi’s efforts on behalf of people of lower caste and those considered “untouchables”, whom he renamed “Harijan” or “Children of God”, should inspire us in our efforts to leave no one behind, and to help those farthest behind first.

Gandhi looked at the world from the point of view of the lowliest and the most humble – but is acknowledged as one of the greatest leaders of all time. His values truly transcend borders.

We have issued our own United Nations stamp to commemorate this occasion, but we are in the company of more than 100 countries that have issued or are planning to issue stamps to honour this global leader.

Gandhi’s enduring legacy is his continued relevance to our thinking and action on a broad sweep of issues, from protecting the environment to promoting justice, from education to inequality. His teaching remains fresh and thought-provoking, including his emphasis on the importance of facing up to the truth with courage.

Perhaps Gandhi’s most important legacy was in creating a culture of peace, in proving the effectiveness of non-violent non-cooperation, and drawing the world’s attention to the gap between what we do, and what we are capable of doing.

Gandhi’s ideas drive the work of the United Nations for equality, empowerment and global citizenship every day.

I know they also drive the thinking of many global leaders. I commend those who have decided to pay tribute to Gandhi’s legacy by marking this anniversary with a project connected to one of the Sustainable Development Goals – a fitting way to honour this most action-oriented leader.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of India for supporting the elimination of single-use plastic at the United Nations, and the installation of solar panels and a green roof on top of the Conference Building.

I wish you all a successful and inspiring meeting and the capacity to fully understand and make living in our hearts the thinking and teaching of Gandhi.
Nowhere is safe to hide in war-torn Yemen, say UN-appointed rights experts

The people of Yemen have been subject to “numerous” possible war crimes in recent years including forced recruitment of children and sexual abuse in detention, UN-appointed senior rights experts, in an appeal to the international community to do more to end the conflict.

At the launch of its second report into alleged violations committed in the Arabian Peninsula State, where the internationally recognized Government of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi is fighting chiefly Houthis opposition forces, the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen insisted that there had been “a pervasive lack of accountability”.

Both sides were responsible, the experts insisted, and assessments that many thousands of people had been killed “are likely to be a gross underestimate”, expert Charles Garraway insisted.

“The parties to the conflict in Yemen – all the parties – are responsible for numerous violations of human rights, of international law and humanitarian law,” said panel chair Kamel Jenoubi. “Some of these violations may constitute war crimes.”

Describing what kind of daily terrors Yemenis had to face, Mr. Jenoubi noted that there was nowhere safe to hide in the war-torn country – a deliberate tactic by the warring sides.

“The missiles, the airstrikes, the snipers, (that) hit people going about their daily business, often without warning and in places where there’s no active conflict,” he said. “It gives the impression that there’s nowhere in Yemen that you can call safe, or where you can hide.”

460,000 cholera cases in first six months of 2019

Another war tactic outlined in the report is the targeting of health centres and services, which has had a devastating impact on a population verging on famine and brought low by some 460,000 cases of suspected cholera in the first half of the year alone.

“We’ve had incidents this year where the Coalition has struck an MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières) cholera treatment centre just prior to it opening for business, so taking that out of action for the year,” said Ms. Parke. “And we’ve had both sides of the parties to the conflict actively impeding the delivery of cholera vaccines to the population of Yemen.”

The panel, which was established in 2017 following a request by the Human Rights Council to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, also found further testimonies of other worrying practices by those fighting, including the forced recruitment of children.

Fighters recruit children ‘by force’

“The parties – all the parties – actively recruit children, including by force,” Mr. Jenoubi said. “The parties to the conflict harass and threaten rights activists, journalists, human rights defenders, humanitarian workers, they impose restrictions on their work, that often cut off services provided to people in need.”

Turning to the belligerents’ decision to prevent Yemenis from importing much of the fuel, food and medicines they have needed in the past through key Red Sea ports like Hudaydah, Mr. Jenoubi likened the tactic to a siege and “attacks against things that are essential to the population’s survival”.

The population had been deprived of “food, water and medicine at a time of an unprecedented humanitarian crisis”, he insisted, with more than 24 million people – 80 per cent of the population dependent on humanitarian aid to survive.

Stop selling arms to warring sides, experts urge

Highlighting the active involvement of other countries including a Saudi-led Coalition which has supported Yemeni Government forces since March 2014, the group of experts urged others States to stop selling arms that could be used in conflict.
WHO welcomes landmark UN declaration on universal health coverage

Today world leaders adopted a high-level United Nations Political Declaration on universal health coverage (UHC), the most comprehensive set of health commitments ever adopted at this level. “This declaration represents a landmark for global health and development,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General at WHO. “The world has 11 years left to make good on its sustainable development goals. Universal health coverage is key to ensuring that happens.” He added: “Universal health coverage is a political choice: today world leaders have signaled their readiness to make that choice. I congratulate them.” The declaration comes the day after the World Health Organization (WHO) and partners flagged the need to double health coverage between now and 2030 or leave up to 5 billion people unable to access health care. In adopting the declaration, U.N. Member States have committed to advance towards UHC by investing in four major areas around primary health care. These include mechanisms to ensure no one suffers financial hardship because they have had to pay for healthcare out of their own pockets and implementing high-impact health interventions to combat diseases and protect women’s and children’s health. In addition, countries must strengthen health workforce and infrastructure and reinforce governance capacity. They will report back on their progress to the U.N. General Assembly in 2023. “Now that the world has committed to health for all, it is time to get down to the hard work of turning those commitments into results,” said Melinda Gates, Co-Chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“We all have a role to play. Donors and country governments need to move beyond business as usual to bolster the primary health care systems that address the vast majority of people’s needs over their lifetimes,” said Gates. On 24 September, WHO and 11 other multilateral organizations, which collectively channel one third of development assistance for health, will launch their Global Action Plan for health and wellbeing for all. The plan will ensure the 12 partners provide more streamlined support to countries to help deliver universal health coverage and achieve the health-related SDG target.
Modern practices give rural farmers relief from the war

“We were like a tree waiting to die slowly,” Warda Saleh reflected. A widow and the mother of four children, Warda lives in Abasar village, Yemen. Her family relies on farming for their livelihood and very survival.

Like millions of other rural farmers, Warda’s crops and income were destabilized by the war in Yemen.

“Our suffering doubled when the war began; we could no longer care for our farm due to the absence of diesel, water scarcity, and the country’s economic conditions in general,” Warda explained.

This is telling, given that in Yemen – agriculture accounts for 20 percent of the country’s gross domestic product and employs over 50 percent of the population.

Fortunately, Warda’s circumstances changed when she was selected by the Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Project (YECRP) funded and supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Implemented by the Small and Micro Enterprise Promotion Service (SMEPS), in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), YECRP helped Warda and her family to improve the quality of their crops, and – with it – their income.

As 1 of 231 crisis-affected rural crop farmers, Warda is now trained in modern farming techniques and practices, and has been given solar water pumps to save on the costs of fuel, water, labor, and to improve crop production.

Warda explained: “In the past, I didn’t know what my farm needed – from water to manure. While using traditional farming techniques, I produced only 300-400 baskets of tomatoes. Now, through drip irrigation and proper fertilizing, my farm’s production of tomatoes has reached 700 baskets. I’m now aiming for 1000.”

Warda hopes that the support continues and reaches other farmers, so that they too can be trained in modern farming techniques and practices.

Now, she doesn’t have to worry about her sons missing school to help her around the farm or her daughter doing the housework while she is busy farming.

“The water is pumped up from the well. Everything works automatically. With just the push of a button, I can do everything. We don’t need to worry about diesel or overworking anymore,” Warda beamed.
One million Yemeni women at risk due to lack of funding says UNFPA

UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, echoes the urgent call by UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen Lise Grande for donors to provide the funding promised earlier this year.

"Over one million Yemeni women need funds now, or they will lose access to life-saving reproductive health services, putting their lives and those of their babies at risk,” said UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem.

By September 2019, UNFPA will be forced to close 175 of the 268 health facilities it currently supports with reproductive health services. This poses a direct threat to more than one million pregnant and lactating women requiring immediate treatment for acute malnutrition and further medical assistance.

Already, the procurement of medicines has stopped. Fourteen safe spaces and four specialized mental health facilities for women have closed.

Every two hours, a woman dies from complications of pregnancy and childbirth, and another 20 suffer injuries, infections or disabilities that could have been prevented. This is the reality faced by an estimated 6 million women and adolescent girls of childbearing age in Yemen.

The protracted conflict has resulted in the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, affecting 24 million people. As grave violations of rights continue, support to affected women and girls is critical. A significant increase in gender-based violence requires urgent protection, healthcare, mental health and psychosocial support, and legal assistance for survivors.

Without funding, the lives of half a million women and girls will be affected. The closure of remaining shelters, safe spaces and specialized facilities will increase the risk of intimidation and violence, and women and girls could be forced into illicit activities to survive.

As the lead agency for the combined response of 23 UN organizations and local and international NGOs, UNFPA calls for urgent funding to provide a package of the most critical lifesaving assistance for newly displaced families on the move, in hard to reach areas, or stranded in the military frontlines. The package includes dignity kits, basic hygiene supplies, and immediate ration kits.

At the end of June, the procurement of dignity kits was suspended and supplies are running scarce. Unless funding is received soon, one million newly displaced people face the probability of being unable to meet basic survival needs during the first weeks of displacement. This will further increase vulnerability and pose higher risks of exploitation, especially for women and girls.

Of UNFPA’s 2019 appeal for $110 million for Yemen’s humanitarian response, only $33 million has been received, leaving a gap of $77 million. We call on donors to provide urgent funding to enable life-saving reproductive health and gender-based violence prevention and response services for women, adolescent girls and others affected by the conflict.
Summit delivers major step up in national ambition and private sector action on pathway to key 2020 climate deadline

As recognition mounts that time is running out, youth leaders warn: ‘we will be watching’

Major announcements by government and private sector leaders at the United Nations Climate Action Summit boosted climate action momentum, and demonstrated growing recognition that the pace of climate action must be rapidly accelerated.

77 countries committed to cut greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, while 70 countries announced they will either boost their national action plans by 2020 or have started the process of doing so.

Over 100 business leaders delivered concrete actions to align with the Paris Agreement targets, and speed up the transition from the grey to green economy, including asset-owners holding over $2 trillion in assets and leading companies with combined value also over $2 trillion.

Many countries and over 100 cities - including many of the world’s largest - announced significant and concrete new steps to combat the climate crisis.

Many smaller countries, including Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries, were among those who made the biggest pledges, despite the fact the they have contributed the least to the problem.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres, in closing the Summit, said “You have delivered a boost in momentum, cooperation and ambition. But we have a long way to go.”

“We need more concrete plans, more ambition from more countries and more businesses. We need all financial institutions, public and private, to choose, once and for all, the green economy.”

Youth leaders including Greta Thunberg drove home the urgency of greater action by leaders, and their determination to hold leaders to account.

Among the major announcements today:

France announced that it would not enter into any trade agreement with countries that have policies counter to the Paris Agreement.

Germany committed to carbon neutrality by 2050

12 countries today made financial commitments to the Green Climate Fund, the official financial mechanism to assist developing countries in adaptation and mitigation practices to counter climate change. This is in addition to recent announcements from Norway, Germany, France and the United Kingdom who have recently doubled their present contributions.

The United Kingdom today made a major additional contribution, doubling its overall international climate finance to £11.6 billion for the period from 2020 to 2025.

India pledged to cut emissions by over 12 billion tons annually, and would pursue a path of high quality growth and low carbon development.

The European Union announced at least 25% of the next EU budget will be devoted to climate-related activities.

The Russian Federation announced that they will ratify the Paris Agreement, bringing the total number of countries that have joined the Agreement to 187.

Pakistan said it would plant more than 10 billion trees over the next five years.

On unprecedented levels of private sector action:

A group of the world’s largest asset-owners -- responsible for directing more than $2 trillion in investments -- committed to move to carbon-neutral investment portfolios by 2050.

87 major companies with a combined market capitalization of over US$ 2.3 trillion pledged to reduce emissions and align their businesses with what scientists say is needed to limit the worst impacts of climate change—a 1.5°C future.

130 banks – one-third of the global banking sector – signed up to align their businesses with the Paris agreement goals.
On transitioning from brown to green energy: Michael Bloomberg will increase the funding and geographic spread of his coal phase out efforts to 30 countries. Already, his work has helped to close 297 out of 530 coal plants in the US. Countries, including France and New Zealand, announced that they will not allow oil or gas exploration on their lands or off-shore waters. Heads of State from Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, and Slovakia, are among those that announced that they will work to phase out coal. The Republic of Korea announced it would shut down four coal-fired power plants, and six more will be closed by 2022, as well as the doubling of its contribution to the Green Climate Fund.

The Summit also delivered critical platforms for improving energy efficiency and reducing the growing energy needs for cooling, with the “Three Percent Club” coalition working to drive a three percent annual global increase in energy efficiency and the Cool Coalition setting ambitious national cooling targets for its members with the potential to deliver up to 1 degree on the pathway to a 2050 net zero carbon world.

On scaling up financing and unlocking barriers to funds:
Many countries announced new contributions to the Green Climate Fund, the official financial mechanism to assist developing countries in adaptation and mitigation practices to counter climate change, with several countries, including France, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom, announcing that they would double their present contributions.

Further, the Climate Investment Platform was officially announced today. It will seek to directly mobilize US$ 1 trillion in clean energy investment by 2025 in 20 Least Developed Countries in its first year. Summit initiatives were designed to ensure the actions undertaken would be fair for all, supporting jobs and clear air for better health, and protect the most vulnerable, as well as new initiatives on adaptation, agriculture and early warning systems that will protect 500 million additional people against the impacts of climate change.

New initiatives announced today have been designed to be scaled up to deliver impact at the global scale needed. The Secretary-General urged governments, businesses and people everywhere to join the initiatives announced at the Summit, and promised to “keep pushing” for greater ambition and action. The Secretary-General committed the UN system to support implementation of plans presented at the Summit, with an initial report to be delivered at COP25 in Santiago, Chile.

A full list of the announcements and commitments made at the Climate Summit can be found at www.un.org/climatechange moderated by the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Jayathma Wickramanayake, is available to view here.

More information on the UN Youth Climate Summit can be found at https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/youth-summit.shtml. Follow @UNYouthEnvoy on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook for the latest updates on the Youth Climate Summit.

For further information on the 2019 UN Secretary-General’s Climate Action Summit, please visit https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/index.shtml. Follow @ledealba on Twitter for all the latest breaking news on the Climate Action Summit.

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