Draft

Director-General’s remarks for United Nations Day

30 October 2015

Mr. Ekwe Ethuro, Speaker of the Kenyan Senate,

Mr. Henry Rotich, Cabinet Secretary National Treasury,

Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director, UNEP

Amb. Said Djinnit, Special Envoy of the SG for the Great Lakes Region – Welcome to UN family in Kenya,

Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners,

Ms. Nardos Bekele-Thomas, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Kenya

Invited guests,

Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you today for this very special UN Day celebration. Thank you all for taking the time to attend this event.

This year’s celebration is special for several reasons. Firstly, as we all know, this year’s UN Day is also the 70th anniversary of the founding of the UN. It thus provides a good opportunity to take stock of the achievements of the UN over the past seven decades, and to reflect on how the Organization can move forward to best address the complex and inter-connected challenges of our time.

Looking back over the past 70 years, the United Nations has a record of achievement we can all be proud of: decolonization, combatting diseases, responding to humanitarian crises, protecting human rights, promoting peaceful resolution of conflicts, helping to re-build war-torn societies, spearheading the Millennium Development Goals, which produced the most successful anti-poverty movement in history.

We all live safer and more orderly lives thanks to the globally-accepted norms and standards set by the United Nations in such fields as communications, transportation, trade and other areas.

The UN has many more achievements like this, most of which are unfortunately below the radar screen of the media.

But as we mark this milestone, we must also acknowledge the constraints, limitations and difficulties faced by the UN at 70. The need to reform and adapt the Organization to deal with the new realities of the 21st century is abundantly clear, and this is in fact a major priority for the Organization today.

Indeed, this year’s UN Day celebration is also special because it is taking place at a time of great opportunity -- a potential turning point for humanity.

One month ago in New York, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – 17 goals that build on the MDGs to eradicate poverty, fight inequality and promote a life of dignity for all.

One month from now in Paris, Member States will hopefully secure an internationally-binding universal agreement to combat climate change.

Earlier this year in Addis Ababa, the Action Agenda on financing for development created an important framework to implement the SDGs.

And in 2015, we are also working to strengthen the UN’s efforts in peace and security, with major reviews of our peacekeeping, peace-building and political efforts, as well as the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Collectively, these efforts constitute a blueprint for a more peaceful and sustainable planet, supported by a multilateral architecture that is fit for purpose.

As members of the UN community, we all have to work hard to seize this historic opportunity to build a strong UN and create a better world for all.

It is worth recalling that the actual event commemorated on UN Day each year is the entry into force of the Charter of the United Nations in 1945. The Charter was written in the voice of “we the peoples” of the United Nations. It is a Charter not just for Governments, but for everyone. And it has special significance for those with the least power, the smallest voices, the most vulnerable, the marginalized, the oppressed.

As the only UN Headquarters in Africa, and indeed in the entire global South, the UN family based here in Nairobi has a special opportunity, and arguably a greater responsibility, to advance the goals of the UN Charter. That is because, compared to the other UN Headquarters, we are living and working in closer proximity to the people who are most in need of our support and assistance.

As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon suggests in his UN Day message that I will deliver in a few moments, we should always be guided by those first three words of the UN Charter: “We the peoples”.

Let me add that, as international civil servants, we also need to take to heart that the UN Charter requires UN staff to observe “the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity.”

The UN embodies the highest aspirations of the peoples of the world – fundamental human rights, social justice, the dignity and worth of the human person and respect for the equal rights of men and women. In all their actions, and every day, UN staff members bear responsibility for translating these ideals into reality.

Today, as we rightly recognize our hard work and accomplishments, let us also recommit ourselves to respecting our obligations as international civil servants. Living by the values of the UN and the guiding principles enshrined in the Charter is an essential responsibility for all of us who have the honour and privilege of serving this great Organization.

Another reason that today’s UN Day celebration is so special is that we are also recognizing the admirable efforts of Mr. Harold Kipchumba, whose work in promoting mass immunization has made a major contribution towards eradicating preventable diseases in Kenya. I would like to add my voice of congratulations to Mr. Kipchumba on being named the 2015 UN in Kenya Person of the Year. Your work is an inspiration to us all.

I would also like to pay tribute to the other UN in Kenya award nominees who have received certificates today. Your efforts and dedication are very much appreciated.

Today, we also have the great pleasure of viewing the beautiful stamp issued by the Postal Corporation of Kenya, in commemoration of the UN’s 70th anniversary. I would like to express my warm appreciation to the Post-Master General and Posta Kenya for this brilliant initiative.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of Kenya for its essential role in making Nairobi such an important UN duty station, and for its consistent support to the United Nations as a whole.

I now have the distinct honour of delivering the message of the Secretary-General on the occasion of United Nations Day, which reads of follows:

“National flags are a mark of pride and patriotism in every country around the world. But there is only one flag that belongs to all of us.

That blue flag of the United Nations was a banner of hope for me growing up in wartime Korea.

Seven decades after its founding, the United Nations remains a beacon for all humanity.

Every day, the United Nations feeds the hungry and shelters those driven from their homes.

The United Nations vaccinates children who would otherwise die from preventable diseases.

The United Nations defends human rights for all, regardless of race, religion, nationality, gender or sexual orientation.

Our peacekeepers are on the frontlines of conflict; our mediators bring warriors to the peace table; our relief workers brave treacherous environments to deliver life-saving assistance.

The United Nations works for the entire human family of seven billion people, and cares for the earth, our one and only home.

And it is the diverse and talented staff of the United Nations who help bring the Charter to life.

The 70th anniversary is a moment to recognize their dedication – and to honour the many who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

The world faces many crises, and the limits of collective international action are painfully clear. Yet no single country or organization can address today’s challenges alone.

The timeless values of the UN Charter must remain our guide. Our shared duty is to ‘unite our strength’ to serve ‘we the peoples’.

To mark this anniversary, monuments and buildings across the world are being illuminated in UN blue. As we shine a light on this milestone anniversary, let us reaffirm our commitment to a better and brighter future for all.”

End of quote.

Thank you for your kind attention.