Secretary-General’s remarks at the World Government Summit [as delivered]

Dubai, 13 February 2017

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It’s an enormous pleasure and an enormous honor to be here. I am very grateful to your Highness [Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum] for your very kind invitation.

If one looks at today’s governance problems at the country level, between countries or at multilateral governance in the world, we face a terrible lack of trust. Lack of trust between peoples, between governments and political establishment. Lack of trust between countries and lack of trust in relation to governance in global multilateral institutions.

Looking at country level, it is clear that globalization has been an enormous progress, complete with technological development, globalization brought a huge increase in wealth, a reduction in absolute poverty in our world, improved welfare in general, but globalization had its losers. We have the rust belts of this world. Lots of people who feel they were left behind and that the political establishments of their countries have not taken care of them. On the other hand, we see the inability to handle problems relating to the movements of people, to migration, refugees and then linkage that is made to terrorism, the feeling of insecurity and anxiety. Also, this sense that governments are not taking good care or being able to handle it properly.

We see youth, youth that is the potential of mankind. But, in many countries that have problems in relation to the capacity to find hope, to find jobs, even if they are educated, creating enormous frustrations. All this generates, in a context where also political systems have not been able to adapt to the new changes in the communication and information technologies, this has generated a gap between public opinion, societies, and governments. That is one of the factors, today, that undermines governance. And then, if we associate it, in certain societies, with corruption and other problems, we understand that we have a serious problem to handle.

Now, it is clear that reform is needed to reconcile people with political establishments; political establishment need to adapt to these technologies in information and communication; need to empower citizens and empower young people. I am a strong believer in a German philosopher, [Jurgen] Habermas, who said: “the key element of democracy is the permanent intercommunication between the political society and the civil society and the fact that the civil society influences the decision making process in the political society.”
Now, with technology, this has changed. Governments have not been able to adapt to the changes in technologies that force these interactions for participation to have a different nature and reform for creating conditions for a government to interact in a modern way for societies is, I think, a crucial area of reform that is needed and bringing with it the empowerment of youth and the capacity of young people to have a say in the destiny of their own countries.

Improving governance, and improving confidence between governments and people, is essential and it is a condition to improve the confidence in the relations between countries. We live today in a world that is no longer bipolar, no longer unipolar but it is not yet multipolar. It’s really chaotic. The relationships are unclear, bringing with it unpredictability and impunity that tends to proliferate everywhere. And in which there is a deep mistrust between countries and groups of countries that, of course, facilitates the multiplication of conflicts and the difficulty to solve them. We need a surge of diplomacy for peace. We need to be able to have honest brokers trying to bring together those countries that are essential for the solution of those conflicts we face in different parts of the world, and namely in this region. But we need to able to address the root causes of conflict and to have the international community organized to address the root causes of conflict.

And that is where the other gap of confidence becomes extremely important. In a world in which everything is global, in which the problems are global – from climate change to the movement of people – there is no way countries can do it by themselves. We need global responses, and global responses need multilateral institutions able to play their role.

For that, it is also important to have confidence in relation to global multilateral institutions and there, there is also a lack of confidence that is obvious. If you look at the UN for instance, there is a clear lack of confidence in the Security Council today and clear perception that the Security Council no longer corresponds to the logic of today’s world in relation to what the world was after the Second World War, when the Security Council was built. It is clear that many international organizations lack the efficiency, the capacity, to respond effectively to the problems they face. We saw the difficulties in ending the global financial crisis. There is a need also for deep reforms in global institutions. Reforms that have to do with power relations, namely in the case of the Security Council, or the way votes are distributed in international financial institutions. But also, reforms that we need introduce in all aspects of what we do.

In relation to my own role in the Secretariat of the UN, I am deeply committed to three ways of reform that I consider essential. First, to adapt our peace and security strategies, operational set-ups, and the institutions within the UN, to be much more effective. We have today seventy to eighty percent of our budget in peacekeeping
operations, most of them in areas where there is no peace to keep. If you want prevention and sustaining of peace to prevail, we need to link peace and security with sustainable and inclusive development. And to make sure that the two, together with the improvement of the human rights situation in the world, guarantee that the root causes of conflict are addressed, and for that, we need to reform our own way of doing business in the UN.

Second, is management reform. We have rules and regulations that make the UN very difficult to act effectively. Sometimes I think that that they were conceived to paralyze the institution! We need to create a win-win confidence building capacity among different member states – Western Group, G77, all others – to make them understand that it is in the benefit of everybody to have a UN that is more nimble, more decentralized, with much more simplified procedures.

Then, we need to make sure that we reform the UN development system. We have to recognize that we are still fragmented, that we are still unable to fully coordinate our action and, especially, that the accountability in the UN system needs much strengthened. To reform the UN development system, strengthen coordination and accountability, and making all organization work together to able to support governments in implementing the different crucial objectives that were approved – the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement – and different other aspects of international cooperation in relation to development, are areas in which the reform of the UN is crucial in order to better sustain these processes.

Reform at country level, reform in way countries deal to each other and the way international organizations operate, reform in our multilateral governance system development system are crucial to re-establishing trust. And without trust and I don’t think we will be able to address the very difficult challenges that we face today.