**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS TO THE UNITED NATIONS CIVIL SOCIETY CONFERENCE IN SUPPORT OF THE SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE**

**Nairobi, 10 May 2024**

**[as delivered]**

President William Ruto of the Republic of Kenya, Excellencies, Dear Friends,

Allow me to begin by extending my deepest condolences to all those affected by the devastating floods that have swept through Kenya and neighbouring countries.

I am heartbroken by the destruction, by the lives taken, by the families who have lost everything.

I know that there are also many Brazilians in this room.  I want to express to them also my deep solidarity.

We honour all victims today on this public holiday – The National Tree Growing Day.

And we recognise that together, we can tackle the challenges ahead and prevent damage in the future.

Determination to take that chance is what brings us together today.

Dear Friends,

It is a pleasure to join you to close this civil society conference.

And I thank the Government and people of Kenya for hosting us all so graciously.

And the co-chairs and organising committees for all their work.

I am delighted by the diversity of the delegations here with us:

You represent the breadth of civil society – from international organisations to local groups.

More than half the representatives here are women. And young people have turned out in force.

I thank every one of you for your work – over the past two days and beyond.

Time and again, I have witnessed the enormous impact of civil society in every corner of the world.

I see you easing suffering, pushing for peace and justice, mobilizing for change.

I see you feeding the hungry, standing up for truth, advancing gender equality, and propelling sustainable development.

Many of you work at great personal risk. Climate activists are being criminalised and persecuted; human rights defenders are threatened; and humanitarians killed.

I salute you. I thank you. And I ask you to keep working with us to build a better world.

Today, we are entangled in crises:

Sustainable development is under threat.

Conflicts are erupting with alarming frequency and horrifying results.

Inequality and poverty are tearing societies apart.

Many developing countries are being suffocated by debt, and a cost-of-living crisis.

Climate chaos is knocking communities off their feet – with the poorest suffering the most.

And new technologies – particularly artificial intelligence – are creating new threats, while fuelling old bigotries and divisions.

These terrible trends are playing out brutally here in Africa:

Where conflicts rage;

Extreme weather turbocharged by the climate crisis is tearing through communities with appalling consequences – the deadly floods here in Kenya are a prime example;

And millions of people are on the far end of the digital divide.

Dear Friends,

These crises demand international solutions. But the international system is not up to the task.

The United Nations Security Council is paralysed by geopolitical divides, incapable of acting together on clear violations of international law.

The international financial system is outdated, dysfunctional and unjust.

Debt relief mechanisms are totally inadequate, leaving countries marooned in a sea of exorbitant interest payments and debt service costs.

Many international institutions mirror the world in which they were founded almost eighty years ago.

Developing countries are underrepresented and under-served.

And civil society is often marginalized.

We need to reform and revitalise multilateralism so that it reflects the realities of today, and is fit to face the challenges ahead.

The report I presented on Our Common Agenda sets out the vision for a more inclusive, networked and effective multilateralism.

A multilateralism where the contribution of civil society are recognised as central – not a token or an afterthought.

And this ambition reflects the vital role you play.

I have long admired a brilliant German philosopher: Jürgen Habermas, probably the one that has had more influence in my political philosophical thinking when I was young.

One of his key ideas is on intercommunication between civil society and the political realm in modern democracies: how that is essential to those democracies and how it shapes decision-making and is vital to creating laws and policies that are acceptable to citizens.

In other words: at the national level, civil society is an essential bridge between people and their representatives – part of the glue that holds democracies together.

And what is true for national politics must be true for global politics.

And so I believe it is crucial to establish dialogue between political decision-makers and civil society within all our international institutions.

And this is key to rebuilding trust and restoring legitimacy; and to ensuring international decisions are shaped by the concerns, the values and the experiences of people across the globe.

Dear Friends,

The Summit of the Future is a key moment to drive forward our vision for a renewed multilateralism.

On the road to the Summit, we are striving to fully engage civil society.

And the Summit itself aims to push progress on key issues. And strengthen and update multilateralism – so that we can manage both the risks and opportunities ahead, for the good of all humanity:

Turbocharging the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals;

Unlocking finance for climate action and development;

And driving progress towards deep reform of the international financial architecture – so that it corresponds to the realities of today’s economy; and so that it can provide an effective safety net for developing countries in moments as difficult as the present one. And the same naturally applies to the Security Council of the United Nations;

Together, we must create a new Emergency Platform – so we can collaborate as soon as crises hit;

Renew governance of outer space – to reduce risks, and reap benefits;

Embed young people at the heart of decision-making in multilateralism;

And agree on ways to consider the interests of future generations in today’s decisions.

We must close digital divides, and move towards new governance structures for new technologies – harnessing artificial intelligence as a force for good for all humanity. Not just for the rich.

And we must revitalise our collective approach to peace and security with a New Agenda for Peace.

That means prioritising prevention and changing our approach:

Recognising that conflicts do not spring from nowhere and embracing an expansive model – one that encompasses human rights, gender, sustainable development, and the links between climate and security. That is the true prevention, not just simply talking to some politicians to see if they don’t start a war;

Priorities are now backwards – with record levels of spending for arms, and budget cuts for social sectors, for people.

We need to reposition disarmament at the centre of the international agenda and act urgently to create a world free from nuclear weapons.

And we need to tackle the sinister danger of lethal autonomous weapons – outlawing arms capable of taking human life without any human control and no accountability.

Across all of these areas, human rights and gender equality are critical.

And so is the contribution of the civil society.

Dear Friends,

When we see the heartbreaking record number of civilians killed in Gaza with our appeals for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, the release of all hostages and unimpeded humanitarian access falling on deaf ears.

When we see a civil war ravaging in Sudan with two leaders that do not seem to care about the tremendous suffering of their own people.

When we see conflict unabated in the Sahel, the Great Lakes, and the Horn of Africa, we understand that something is fundamentally wrong in the present world order as if the Charter of the United Nations, international law, international humanitarian law, human rights and basic human decency no longer matter.

We won’t give up in our struggle to change this situation to push for peace, justice and human rights, and I know that you won’t give up either.

My best hope for the future is you.

Dear Friends,

We need to be informed by your frontline know-how;

We need your can-do attitude to overcome obstacles and find innovative solutions.

And we need you to use your networks, knowledge and contacts to implement solutions, and to persuade governments to act.

Your contributions have been indispensable – and I thank you.

And your new ImPact Coalitions promise a new era of engagement.

These models of collaboration span ages, regions and sectors. And focus civil society’s energy and expertise for maximum impact on the challenges we face.

I invite you to bring with you this spirit to the Action Days we are holding as the Summit of the Future will begin.

And I ask you to engage your national governments – using your channels and networks to demand ambitious commitments at the Summit, not business as usual.

Dear Friends,

The Summit of the Future is a chance to push progress on the issues that matter to you – and to us. A chance that cannot be missed.

Our fight is one fight:

Creating a better world and a brighter future for all.

Together let’s seize this chance, and make the Summit of the Future really count.

Thank you.