Readout for the Secretary-General’s meeting with H.E. Mr. Imran KHAN, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

The Secretary-General met with H.E. Mr. Imran Khan, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The Secretary-General expressed appreciation for Pakistan’s support for the work of the United Nations, particularly in UN peace operations. The Secretary-General expressed appreciation for Pakistan’s commitment and generous policy towards refugees.

The Secretary-General and the Prime Minister also exchanged views on developments in Jammu and Kashmir. The Secretary-General informed the Prime Minister that he continues to follow the situation in Jammu and Kashmir with concern and appeals for maximum restraint and full respect for human rights. The Secretary-General reiterated his readiness to exercise his good offices if both sides agree.

Islamabad, 17 February 2020

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REMARKS AT JOINT PRESS BRIEFING WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF PAKISTAN AND THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES
Islamabad, 17 February 2020

I’ll have a very brief message. First to express my deep gratitude and appreciation for the generosity and hospitality of the Pakistanis, for having received for 40 years millions of Afghan refugees.
In a world where so many borders are closed; in a world where so many refugees are rejected or stigmatized, Pakistan has not only opened its border, but the Pakistanis have opened the doors of their houses, and they have opened their hearts to support Afghan refugees. Pakistan has provided the world with a global public good supporting Afghan refugees and it’s time for the international community to assume its responsibilities, and to support Pakistan very meaningfully in this generous hospitality towards Afghan refugees and support Afghan refugees in their, obviously, difficult situation.

Second message: paying tribute to the resilience and the courage of Afghans; Afghan refugees, Afghans displaced, Afghans very dramatic conditions in their own country and to say that it’s time for Afghans to have a chance for peace. It’s time for Afghans to have a chance for development of their own country.

And the [third] message is that there is an opportunity for peace we cannot miss. We have not the right to miss this opportunity. No Afghan will forgive us if this opportunity is not seized. It is absolutely essential that all Afghan leaders and all members of the international community do everything possible to make peace become a reality.

I’m very encouraged by the strong commitment of Pakistan to peace in Afghanistan. And it's also very important that the whole international community, once peace is achieved decides to invest massively, in fact, in Afghanistan, to allow for the country to be able to develop itself, and to create the conditions of prosperity that are needed for Afghans to return; to return and face a new and prosperous life and for peace in the region to be consolidated forever.

I want to once again express my great gratitude for the wonderful hospitality I'm enjoying here in Pakistan, and for the excellent opportunities that were given to me to participate in so many events, in which Pakistan is contributing so positively, not only for the support to Afghan refugees, but for peace and for international cooperation and support of the UN in these very important moments that we are living together.

**Question:** Thank you. This is [Madina], representing GTV network. The question is to the Secretary-General of the U.N. Repatriation of Afghan refugees back to Afghanistan is linked with the peace and stability in Afghanistan, and our foreign minister has rightly talked about a roadmap. So, the question is, who will push forward the peace and reconciliation process? What roles United Nations can play, although Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad held many rounds of talks with Afghan Taliban, but we don’t see any progress in the peace and reconciliation process. So
peace is deeply linked with the repatriation of Afghan refugees. And if peace is not there, definitely it's not possible to send refugees back; and connected to this Pakistan faces threats of terrorism from across the border. So there are safe havens of the terrorists operating very easily on Afghan territory. What message, Excellency, you will give to the Afghan leadership on this? Thank you

Secretary-General: First of all, as I mentioned in my intervention, the UN is ready to participate in any of the peace talks that will take place in namely, in the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process of reconciliation. And those peace talks, of course, will need the assistance of different organizations. The U.N. is totally at the disposal of the Afghans and totally at the disposal of the other actors in order to participate in the peace process and to help to consolidate it.

On the other hand, it is clear that peace among the key Afghan actors is an absolute must in order to fight terrorism effectively, because it is in the context of conflict, that terrorism can spread, and terrorism can prevail. And so, we believe that if peace is established, if all key actors of Afghanistan come together, then it will be possible to isolate terrorist groups. And it will be possible to have a meaningful international support in order to neutralize any terrorist activities in Afghanistan. And the UN Office of counterterrorism is entirely at the disposal of Afghanistan to support that process.

Question: This is Samira Khan, and I am representing [inaudible] News. Secretary-General, first part of my question is for you. Most of the times that we observed that, apart from all the political turmoil within Afghanistan and some of the time in Pakistan as well, the onus, according to the majority, the onus comes on the Afghan government as well, if they have to act responsibly towards the all the political acts of that are happening in Pakistan as well. So most of the times it is the political statements that are the cause and that are the reason for ruining and destabilizing the entire process, and it makes Pakistan feel to reverse and to strictly go through the entire process of repatriation and to make it as soon as possible.

So don't you think that the political government in Afghanistan should also act responsibly towards making things easy for Pakistan and making things easy for Afghan refugees in Pakistan as well. And, Mr. Foreign Minister, my second part addresses you that when we talk about keeping refugees, Afghan refugees in Pakistan for more time, and we keep on giving them deadlines. So what is our economic condition right now to have them for another five years or 10 years? Do we have any plan on hard paper to share with you and so the donors can come forward, and they also take part in that and to shed some responsibilities and burden of Pakistani government in that regard? Thank you so much.
Secretary-General: My answer is very simple. I think it's high time for donors to see Pakistan as an essential partner in the protection and assistance of refugees and to see Pakistan as an essential partner in the construction of the peace in Afghanistan. And to correspond to that by a very strong support to Pakistan, in the context of the global solution of all the problems we have been discussing today.

Question: This is [inaudible] from [inaudible] Television. My question is to the Secretary-General and Foreign Minister can also comment too. Mr. Secretary, you have been visiting Pakistan a number of times as head of the UNHCR. Please tell me from the core of your heart, what is the future of Afghan youngsters who were born in Pakistan and brought up in Pakistan? Don't you think they have a very confused future because they are most Pakistani, half at least if not full. Thank you.

Secretary-General: As I always say, and I believe it's UNHCR’s doctrine, the preferred solution for refugees is always voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity. In all massive return processes in the world, there is always a group of people that, in between got integrated in the society which they leave, because they get married, because they have other kinds of links.

And let's not forget that beyond the refugee phenomenon, there is a migration phenomena in this region. And I believe it will be very important for the governments of Pakistan and Iran and Afghanistan, also to establish a very meaningful cooperation in relation to migration, in order to be able to address situations like the ones that you mentioned, not with the nature and character of refugee protection, but with the nature and character of the movements of population that take place everywhere in the world. But doing it, you know, in a way in which the cooperation among governments allow it to occur orderly, and in a way that takes into account the interests of the people and the interests of the states involved.

Question: Malik, editor of the Delhi Metro Watch. Today's topic is the refugees summit in Islamabad, but the main focus is on Afghan refugees. As a student of journalism, I have known that Pakistan has a rich history to host the refugees from 1947, from India to 1948, from Kashmir to until now, we are hosting a lot of refugees from Kashmir. And in East Pakistan, we are also to, why this part is missing? And one innocent question. Last year, in this month of February, India attacked Pakistan and destroyed our trees and innocent forestry crew. Is the U.N. going to take action against the brutality action against the environment, because UN is very silent when their humanity is dying in Kashmir. My question is that the trees and crew have no bias in the world.
Secretary-General: The opportunity yesterday in the press conference that was related essentially to those issues to fully respond to that question. I will repeat the main principles. First main principle, every problem that exists in the world must be solved with diplomacy and dialogue. Every situation in which there is conflict must deserve de-escalation, and de-escalation both military and verbally. And as I said, my good offices are available provided that all parties want to accept them. And, sir, in all these situations, it's absolutely essential that human rights and fundamental freedoms are fully respected. And that takes place there and everywhere in the world.

Question: First of all, my question is to Mr. Foreign Minister, to you. Does Pakistan want to send back Afghan refugees to their own homeland. If yes, the message has been conveyed to foreign authorities or a foreign government? And my second question is, Mr. Secretary-General, now, reportedly, that India has denied your mediation role, so what options are left for you on the Kashmir issue? Thank you.

Secretary-General: In these circumstances, obviously, we have the role of advocacy that we maintain. And that is the role of the Human Rights High-Commissioner that has been several times quite effective in this regard.

Question: My question is for the U.N. Secretary-General. Mr. Secretary-General, last year, India ordered the status of Kashmir. This dispute is very much on the agenda of the world body. How is the U.N. dealing with India on this count? And the second part of my question. How would you facilitate the repatriation of refugees since we have the history that whenever we have been sending them to come back again. Thank you.

Moderator: Mr. Secretary-General, concluding remarks.

Secretary-General: I had the occasion to say yesterday that in all circumstances, Security Council resolutions need to be respected and that we need to have full respect for the human rights of the people involved.

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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

REMARKS TO THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON 40 YEARS OF HOSTING AFGHAN REFUGEES IN PAKISTAN: A NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR SOLIDARITY

17 February 2020

As-salam alaikum.

We come together to recognize a remarkable story of solidarity and compassion.

It is important to do so for many reasons, not least because it is a story that is sorely lacking in much of our world today.

For forty years, the people of Afghanistan have faced successive crises.

For forty years, the people of Pakistan have responded with solidarity.

That generosity now spans across decades and generations.

This is the world’s largest protracted refugee situation in recorded history.

This is also a story that is close to my heart.

In my previous life as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Pakistan was a familiar destination.

During most of my period as High Commissioner, Pakistan was the number one refugee-hosting country on earth.

For more than three out of every four years since 1979, either Pakistan or Iran have ranked as the world’s top refugee hosting country.

Even though major conflicts have since unfortunately erupted in other parts of the globe and the refugee population has soared, Pakistan today is still the world’s second largest refugee-hosting country.

On every visit here, I have been struck by extraordinary resilience, exceptional generosity and overwhelming compassion.
I saw solidarity not just in words – but in deeds.

This generous spirit is fully in line with what I regard as the most beautiful prescription for refugee protection in world history. It is found in the Surah Al-Tawbah of the Holy Quran:
“And if anyone seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he can hear the words of God. Then escort him where he can be secure.”

This protection should be accorded to believers and non-believers alike in a remarkable example of tolerance many centuries ago before the 1951 Refugee Convention that defines in a modern concept the refugees and the protection they deserve.

I saw that compassion play out in real time here in Pakistan.

And it was grounded in vision.

We have seen many innovative policies take root here: biometric registration, access to the national education system, health care and inclusion in the economy.

Despite Pakistan’s own challenges, these initiatives have made a big difference.

Indeed, many have been recognized as a global model of good practice.

Some of those progressive policies have inspired elements of the Global Compact on Refugees.

We have been proud to work with you to support Pakistani host communities and Afghan refugees. We have done so through integrated humanitarian and development actions across the country – alleviating the burden on Pakistan’s national public service system and helping Afghans sustainably reintegrate back home.

But we must recognize that international support for Pakistan has been minimal compared to your own national efforts.

As we look to the challenges ahead, the global community must step up.

On the one hand, we mark 40 unbroken years of solidarity.

But we also despair at 40 broken years of hostility.
The Afghan conflict drags on and on – and we see the deep impact of the protracted nature of conflict, poverty and forced displacement.

We know the solution lies in Afghanistan.

I hope the signals of a possible pathway for peace will lead to a better future for the people of Afghanistan.

I see with us Ambassador Khalilzad. And I want to strongly encourage to pursue the way of peace. And you can count, and the Afghan people can count, on the United Nations to support the efforts for peace.

We don’t seek any protagonism. We are here only to serve the Afghan people [who] need and deserve, finally, peace and prosperity in full respect of their human rights.

I want to reaffirm that the preferred durable solution for refugees has always been voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity to their country of origin. This is also true for Afghan refugees.

Our efforts on return and reintegration – led in large measure by UNHCR – are aligned with the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework.

We are working together on a region-specific Support Platform to assist voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration of refugees in Afghanistan, while providing help to refugees and their host communities in both Pakistan and Iran.

Our aim is to galvanize more resources and more investments, widen the circle of partners and forge stronger linkages between humanitarian, development and peace investments.

Youth empowerment must be a special focus.

We need a renewed commitment. We need to make sure that there is not only a strong movement for peace but that peace leads to effective reconstruction, creating the conditions for a successful return and reintegration of Afghan refugees.

Working towards solutions for the Afghan people is not just a sign of solidarity; it is in the world’s best interest.
Afghans now constitute the largest group of arrivals in Europe, exceeding for the first time the arrivals from Syria.

Returns to Afghanistan, as we have said, have hit a historical low.

Afghanistan and its people cannot be abandoned.

Now is the time for the international community to act and deliver.

Our ability to succeed will be a litmus test for the Global Compact on Refugees – its promise of greater responsibility-sharing with countries that have shouldered the burden until now.

Peace efforts leading to intra-Afghan negotiations will pave the way, but sustainable peace and security hinges on better integrating our work on humanitarian, development and peace efforts.

Done right, this work can be a model for the rest of the world.

We must be realistic. We know big challenges lie ahead.

But the message of this conference – and the presence of so many senior Government officials from all over the world – is a testament of hope and commitment to a new partnership for solidarity and a better future for the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan and for the world.

Shukriya.