It is a pleasure to be back in Pakistan – a country deeply committed to multilateralism and the United Nations.

This is my first visit as Secretary-General of the United Nations, but as High Commissioner for Refugees, I had the opportunity – I was fortunate — to be able to visit this country several times.

And as I said this afternoon in the conference on sustainable development and climate change, what I’ve seen — the generosity and solidarity with the Afghan people — has created a love affair between the [Pakistani] people and myself.

I would like to thank the Government of Pakistan and Prime Minister Imran Khan personally for inviting me, as well as Foreign Minister Qureshi for his strong support of the United Nations.

I have a full agenda, but there is a common thread to all my events and meetings here.

It is simply this: to recognize Pakistan’s outstanding generosity and solidarity over many decades and to highlight its place in confronting some of the biggest global challenges our world faces today.

I strongly believe it is time for the world to step back and look at Pakistan through a wider frame.

One of the main purposes of my visit is to spotlight the real Pakistan — with all its possibility and potential.

It is deeply rooted in Pakistani culture — from the vision of Muhammad Ali Jinnah … to the philosophy of Allama Iqbal … to the music of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

From the courageous example of Malala Yousafzai … to the giving spirit of Abdul Sattaar Edhi … to the visual artistry and advocacy of Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy.

And, of course, on better days, we also see it from the bats of the Pakistan cricket team — both the men’s and women’s teams, I might add!
Here in Pakistan, we see solidarity in action.

Pakistan is today the world’s second largest host of refugees – and for decades, it was the first.

I look forward to taking part tomorrow in a conference marking Pakistan’s four decades of support for Afghan refugees.

For 40 years, despite Pakistan’s own challenges, Pakistan has sheltered and protected Afghan refugees with limited support from the international community.

I can testify to this. Having served as High Commissioner for Refugees, I always found in Pakistan a reliable and generous partner.

One can only imagine how much worse the plight of Afghans would be, and how much more unstable the region might be, without Pakistan’s stellar example of hospitality and compassion.

The United Nations will continue to support Pakistan, and I call on other countries to support Pakistan and indeed show similar leadership in sharing this responsibility in this region and around the world.

As we look to issues of peace and security, the United Nations is profoundly grateful for the dedication and commitment of Pakistan’s peacekeepers.

Pakistan has consistently been one of the world’s top contributors to UN peacekeeping, with more than 4,000 men and increasingly women serving today in nine missions around the globe.

I also appreciate the Government’s strong support for the Action for Peacekeeping initiative, and for its commitment to continue to improve the effectiveness of our operations.

Foreign Minister Qureshi and I discussed regional security in South Asia.

With respect to Jammu and Kashmir, I am grateful for the work of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan. UNMOGIP will continue to monitor the ceasefire at the Line of Control in accordance with its mandate. And today I was happy I could inaugurate the new premises of their headquarters.
I am deeply concerned about the increase in tensions that we have witnessed last year.

I have repeatedly stressed the importance of exercising maximum restraint and taking steps to de-escalate, both militarily and verbally, while reiterating my offer to exercise my good offices, should both sides ask. Diplomacy and dialogue remain the only tools that guarantee peace and stability, with solutions in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the resolutions of the Security Council. Simultaneously, when we see situations of discontent and unrest, it is of utmost importance to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Turning now to Afghanistan, I am following closely the important efforts to bring peace to the country. Achieving a comprehensive settlement to the conflict is essential for saving lives and advancing sustainable development. It is my hope that discussions will be productive in leading to a reduction in violence, especially violence that harms civilians. Reducing violence is critical to build confidence and support for a peace process that leads to a lasting political settlement and a permanent ceasefire.

Such conditions would contribute to enabling the peaceful return of displaced persons and refugees to their homes.

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.

Through its support to the ongoing peace efforts and building the necessary regional consensus, Pakistan continues to play a crucial role in realizing this potentially historic opportunity for peace.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting an inclusive and Afghan-led peace process that upholds the human rights of all citizens and leads to a sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

During my visit to Pakistan, I also look forward to visiting the newly opened Kartarpur Corridor connecting two key Sikh pilgrimage sites.

This is a welcome symbol of interfaith harmony, a unique experiment in cross-border ties, showing Pakistan’s commitment to peace.
The climate crisis is another key challenge of common concern -- and once again, Pakistan is on the frontlines as one of the most vulnerable countries on the planet.

I welcome Pakistan’s ambition to take concrete action with the “ten billion tree tsunami” campaign and many other initiatives.

For my part, I will continue pressing for action to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees, which means to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

It means more ambition by all – more ambition on mitigation, adaptation, resilience and finance. Major emitting countries and industrial sectors have a particular responsibility to lead the way.

And it means a successful UN Climate Conference – COP26 – later this year in Glasgow and I count on Pakistan’s strong commitment to that.

Finally, I would like to recognize Pakistan’s commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the world’s framework for eliminating poverty, achieving gender equality, protecting the environment and building a fair globalization that works for all.

Pakistan was in the global lead in integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into its own national development agenda.

This is yet another example of the commitment and vision that we need to see more of around the world. I look forward to the rest of my visit and engaging with the leadership and people of Pakistan.

The United Nations family is strongly committed to helping the country advance prosperity and peace for all. Thank you.

Q: Excellency, my question, I will also ask, as Foreign Minister Qureshi has mentioned - I also refer to your statement of 8 August of last year, in which you reaffirmed the United Nations’ principled position on the Kashmir dispute. I wish to know what practical steps would you and your office take for the solution of this issue. And secondly, we are about one and a half months into the year 2020 and there have been more than 287 ceasefire violations along the Line of Control. I wish to know what’s stopping the United Nations to ensure that its military observers are given a hassle-free and free access to the Line of Control, as this may lead to a big conflict in the region. Thank you so much.
SG: Thank you very much. First of all, from the beginning, I have offered my good offices in relation to the situation, and of course, good offices can only work when accepted by both sides. On the other hand, I believe that there was an important contribution to clarifying what has happened by the report that was mentioned of the Human Rights High Commissioner. On the other hand, it is clear that we have taken a position about the need for Security Council resolutions to be implemented and for effective de-escalation and dialogue linked to that, with another very important condition, which is full respect for human rights and [fundamental] freedoms in Jammu and Kashmir.

In relation to the ceasefire, I visited UNMOGIP. We believe that UNMOGIP should have full freedom of movement; it has on the Pakistani side - we hope that this will also be achieved on the other side, and we will be strengthening its equipment capacity in order to better be able to implement its mandates.

Q: I am the correspondent from China, Xinhua news agency. And my question is, four Pakistani citizens have been infected by the novel coronavirus epidemic in China have already been cured and discharged three days ago. And as we know, Chinese government and people have been making an all-out effort to fight the global coronavirus disease, with notable outcomes. So how do you evaluate those measures? And in terms of the high, top leaders commanding and mobilization of the whole country, do you think that China offers a useful reference to the other countries and whole world in handling such a big public health threat? Thank you so much.

SG: First of all, in relation to the Pakistanis in China, I believe that the Government has been in close contact with the World Health Organization and that the government has acted in line with the principles defined by the World Health Organization in that regard. In relation to the situation in itself, it's of course a huge challenge. I believe that the response has been a very strong and very impressive response. Obviously, in a situation as complex as this, it is always difficult to have a quick solution. And the Chinese Government was the first to mention that there were a few limitations and the shortcomings. But I think that the effort that is in place is a gigantic effort. And we are very confident that efforts that that effort will allow for the progressive reduction of the disease.

Q: First of all, most welcome, Mr Secretary-General, to Pakistan. I am Faisal Raza Khan from 92 News. My question is that, as honourable Foreign Minister has said, would you agree to that early repatriation of Afghan refugees, vis-à-vis to the peace process? Do you think early repatriation would help a successful peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan? Thank you.
SG: I think it's very Important to respect the principles - I mean, the principles that have always been principles shared between the Government of Pakistan and the UNHCR, have been the principle of voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity. What we believe is this is the moment in which we need to create an important “pull effect” in Afghanistan, through peace and through reconstruction, the creation of jobs, the creation of opportunities, making the roadmap that was described by the Minister a roadmap to allow for a phased programme of return of the Afghans to be entirely successful. I think now, the biggest effort to be made is in Afghanistan, and I appeal to the international community to masssively support Afghanistan, both to reach peace and then, based on peace, to do an effective reconstruction of the country to create the conditions for not only the well-being of the Afghan people in Afghanistan, but for the effective repatriation of refugees from Pakistan and Iran.

Q: Thank you so much, sir. Pakistan has lost billions of dollars fighting the war on terror, in an attempt to make this world a better place to live. And how do you see Pakistan’s effort to counter the menace of trans-national terrorism? And would you or your office play a role, an active role in convincing – because there are some countries who are not fully convinced at Pakistan’s efforts to counter the menace of terrorism, would your office be playing a role to convince or convey to those countries that, yes, Pakistan has done enough? How do you see that? Thank you.

SG: Well, I can testify, I came once to Islamabad and Islamabad was a military camp. And the Taliban was very close… the Pakistani Taliban were very close to Islamabad. They had overrun the Swat Valley and they were even a little bit further south. And I have to say that to be today in Islamabad, a family duty station for UN staff, and to compare with the past and to know what in between has been done in the territories that were FATA, and now, I believe, are integrated into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and to see that administration is being put in place and to see that there is an intense program of development, that I believe that one has to recognize that the efforts that Pakistan has made to fight terrorism are absolutely remarkable and that they were very successful and everybody should support Pakistan to, I would say, consolidate these enormous efforts that I could witness myself. As I said, I've been here in the worst phase of the problem. And it's very rewarding to come back and see how different these things are.

Q: Thank you. Mr. Secretary-General, there is another global issue that is Islamophobia and why the West fears Islam and the Muslims? And it is to be noted that Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Malaysia have taken a joint initiative to counter this Islamophobia. We were there at UNGA when you also spoke about this in your speech in last year, UNGA session. How do you view these efforts? And what further support you will extend to this initiative by Pakistan?....
SG: Well, Islamophobia is absolutely intolerable, as any other form of intolerance that we see today, be it against migrants or refugees that sometimes are attacked by populist politicians, or other forms of religious hatred of all kinds. So, it is for me absolutely evident that we need to fight Islamophobia very strongly. Hate speech is one of the most important instruments of Islamophobia. And we have launched recently, led by our Special Representative against genocide, we have launched a global UN initiative against hate speech, which I believe goes perfectly in line with the initiative that you have just mentioned. And at the same time, we are totally committed in our action around the world, to fight against all forms of populism that try to use Islamophobia and other forms of hatred as a tool to win votes, which is totally unacceptable. It is unacceptable that people try to win power dividing the people. This is against all democratic principles. And I think it's our duty to preserve interfaith dialogue, to preserve harmony among religions. And I believe that my visit tomorrow to the corridor of Kartarpur will be the symbol of that dialogue and that tolerance.