



PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement

by

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for Europe**

at

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, fellow Nordics,

It is for me a unique moment to be here at the Nordic Council representing the United Nations and the UN Secretary-General not only because I belong personally to both the UN family and the Nordic family, but because throughout the past 70 years there have been unique and close historic ties between the Nordic countries and the United Nations.

Every day when I go to work at the Palais des Nations in Geneva I am reminded of how countries after the First World War promised never to go to war again and came together in the League of Nations and constructed the historic Palais des Nations. It reminds me of how the League of Nations, as one of the few success stories, managed to find a peaceful solution to the Åland dispute between Finland and Sweden in 1921. But it also reminds me of how the crisis in the 1930s eroded the cooperation and solidarity between countries in Europe leading to collapse of the League of Nations, the Second World War, and one of the largest refugee and migration crisis ever seen.

Today we again face violent conflicts and large movements of people in and around Europe. In tackling this challenge we must learn from our history. We cannot let the crisis divide us.

On this background, the Secretary-General *welcomes your focus at this session on the challenge of migration as we work together to address the current refugee crisis and the largest amount of displacement since the Second World War*. Let me read out his message to this meeting:

Migration and refugee flows are a global challenge. We have a responsibility to define a clear path forward guided by international refugee law, human rights and humanitarian law.

We must do our utmost to save lives.

We must ensure the protection of refugees and migrants and the right of refugees to seek asylum.

We must apply the principle of non-discrimination to both refugees and migrants, treating them with dignity and respect.

We must strengthen reception centres and asylum systems and boost the number of refugee resettlement places.

We must create more safe and legal channels for refugees and labor migration at all skills levels.

We must join forces to eradicate ruthless criminal networks of human traffickers and smugglers – and can strengthen our efforts based on the Security Council resolution.

And we must strengthen cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination and

commit to equitable sharing of responsibilities.

I applaud a number of the recent initiatives taken by the European Union and the Nordic countries. But much more is needed.

When migration takes place as a matter of genuine choice, it boosts the human development potential. It benefits host and home societies alike. Yet, too often, distortions and prejudice form the basis of migration and refugee debates. The future does not belong to those who seek to build walls or exploit fears. Let us work together to address this challenge with creativity, compassion and courage.

This was the message from the Secretary-General. We cannot and must not turn a migration crisis into a crisis of global solidarity.

Instead we should bring new life to the words of a fellow Nordic, former UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, who, some fifty-five years ago, said what still holds true today: “The health and strength of a community depend on every citizen’s feeling of solidarity with the other citizens, and on his willingness, in the name of this solidarity, to shoulder his part of the burdens and responsibilities of the community. The same is of course true of humanity as a whole”¹.

Our actions must be based on international cooperation and international law. The best long-term defense against injustice and terror is to stand firm on the rule of law and human rights.

This is where the Nordic countries have always stood and still stand. The Nordic countries have throughout the seventy years of the United Nations been among the strongest proponents of a world governed by international cooperation, international law and international human rights. This position has earned you deep respect in the entire world and it has given hope to citizens all over the world where the Nordic model of freedom, rule of law, prosperity and solidarity is still only a dream.

I urge you not to waver, not to weaken. Do not risk throwing away your historic position in a migration and refugee crisis that you can handle, that you can manage, if you work together. Stand firm against hatred, racism and attempts to weaken the rights of migrants. As the Secretary-General said it, show *creativity, compassion and courage*.

We need a strong Nordic voice in favor of comprehensive approaches to the handling and resolution of refugee situations, premised on strong international cooperation and coordination, especially at the regional level. No single country, acting alone, can deal with the challenges and opportunities posed by human mobility. And we need a strong Nordic engagement in the tools to prevent, mediate and resolve the political divisions that are at the root of the crisis, in Syria and elsewhere.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

¹ Dag Hammarskjöld, “Asia, Africa, and the West.” Address Before the Academic Association of the University of Lund. Lund, Sweden, May 4, 1959 (UN Press Release SG/813, May 4, 1959)

This is also in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Having been part of the discussions from the very start, it was also for me also personally the culmination of a five year journey when over 150 Heads of States and Governments adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The goals represent a very ambitious vision of a world with peace and security, where prosperity is truly shared, with equality between women and men, where nobody is left behind and environmental degradation is stopped and reversed. A sustainable world will be a safer one. The links to the current migration crisis are evident.

Although the adoption of the goals seemed like the end of a long journey, it is only the beginning. We must now transform this vision into action in all countries – also in all Nordic Countries. And we must do so fast.

It is a gigantic task and a complex task.

We need to develop innovative funding mechanisms and rethink the way we measure economic progress and profits to channel investments towards sustainable development.

We must think out of the box in creating new and effective alliances and partnerships.

We need new ways of measuring and new sources of data, and big data, also to live up to our promise that no one is left behind.

We must improve access to information to engage the public in both advocacy and implementation. Here, the Aarhus Convention, hosted by UNECE, on access to information and public participation is a key instrument.

We need to strengthen the mechanisms to review progress, so we can keep us all accountable.

And we must strengthen our international cooperation to translate global goals into new and common agreements, norms, standards and conventions that can assist countries, citizens and companies to take action. The first test is COP21 in Paris where we need a strong climate agreement. But it spans beyond all areas. We need to step up our cooperation to create cleaner air, energy efficient housing, trade facilitation, safer cars and cooperation on water, just to mention a few of the hundreds of norms, standards and conventions we host at UNECE.

This also puts new pressure on the United Nations. While I hope the SDGs will help us to significantly change the world, I know they will help us to change the UN. We must reform, dismantle the silos and strengthen the synergies across the multiple UN organizations and entities. We must work together to establish “centres of excellence” in support of each and every SDG.

It puts heavy responsibilities on all of us working at the UN. However, Member States must also do their part with less micromanagement, new funding mechanisms to support

cooperation and less focus on individual mandates for different parts of the UN. With the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, we have one global agenda - a global mandate for the UN - and Member States must allow us to use it to shape a stronger and more effective UN.

I hope the Nordic countries will once again take the lead, as you did back 25 years ago with the Nordic UN Project. I hope we will see a new ambitious Nordic UN Project, which can help us build a stronger UN in support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

However, when all this is said, the most decisive precondition for success is that you did not only go to New York to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals but also returned home with the political will to develop strong national plans towards sustainable development. Here I hope and trust we will once again see the Nordic countries in the lead.

It was a long journey to agree on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. But the journey towards achieving the goals is much longer. If we fail the risks are substantive, if we achieve it the rewards are significant. We are the first generation with the ability to eradicate extreme poverty. We are the last generation with the ability to stop climate change. Hope you will work together to make it happen.

Economic cooperation in Europe

This leads me to my final point: the need for increased cooperation in Europe, not only when it comes to migration, but also on economic issues. I started with the lessons from the League of Nations and the Second World War. I will end there as well.

When UNECE was established 68 years ago it was because, to quote the unanimously adopted resolution number 1 in 1951, “constructive economic cooperation was essential to the maintenance of peace”. Or, as the first Executive Secretary, Gunnar Myrdal from Sweden, stated it: “The more tightly the limitation of the political factors has affected economic cooperation, the bigger would be the common gains of such cooperation – if it were possible.”

Right now, Europe is moving in the opposite direction. We see conflict and lack of trust between the countries of Europe. We see countries breaking ties, building barriers, striving to be independent and imposing sanctions. This is not in the long run the direction Europe needs.

I hope that the fragile but promising ceasefire in Ukraine will soon allow us to reverse this tendency. I hope we will soon be able to pursue the vision in the historical mandate of UNECE and the vision expressed in the political declaration from Minsk in February this year - “a vision of a common humanitarian and economic space from the Atlantic to the Pacific”.

If there is one thing we have learned from the history of Europe, it is that to build peace, we need to build bridges, dismantle barriers and work towards increased cooperation and

interdependency. The road to peace goes through more trade, transport, tourism between the countries and citizens in Europe.

Therefore, I hope the ceasefire on the battleground can be followed by not only a ceasefire on the marketplace, but by increased cooperation. This is the mandate I stand upon – and throughout the cold war, despite the iron curtain, my organization helped to shape constructive economic cooperation to the benefit of peace – resulting in hundreds of norms, standards and conventions that shape cooperation in Europe and increasingly worldwide – including 58 transport agreements and conventions, including global vehicle regulations with Sweden as a key driver, five environmental conventions – two of them, Aarhus and Espoo, named after Nordic cities, 480 global recommendations on trade facilitation – where the Nordic Council was behind recommendation no. 1: the UN Layout Key for Trade Documents 60 years ago. Since the Second World War the Nordic Countries have been a driving force behind stronger economic cooperation in Europe.

I call on the Nordic countries to once again help to build bridges and break down barriers on the European continent. To show Europe, as was done during the discussions on Åland in 1921, that conflicts can be solved peacefully by diplomatic means and be turned into models of cooperation. And to help reinvigorate the vision of increased economic cooperation and connectivity in Europe as a pathway to peace and progress. Help to integrate the integrations and pursue the vision of a common humanitarian and economic space from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Thank you for your attention.
