

Your Highness,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Copenhagen taught us 30 years ago that social development and inclusion is essential for strong societies.

Today, Doha must go the last mile and teach us how to leave no one behind, end social injustice, and guarantee dignity for everyone.

In prioritizing a 'people-first' approach, Copenhagen helped give birth to the SDGs, and later the Pact for the Future.

We have seen these last three decades what power we can have as an international community, as the United Nations, when working together, when overcoming divides:

- Unemployment, which stood at 1 billion people – 30% of the global workforce in 1995 – fell to a historic low of 5% in 2024.
- Extreme poverty declined from 2 billion people in 1990 – over a third of the population back then – to just over 800 million today.

- and access to education and health has increased in every single region.

But since Copenhagen, we have also seen that economic growth alone has been insufficient to pull people in all regions out of poverty.

And that growth without boundaries or oversight could actually deepen the global divide and the very structures that underpin it.

There is a great exercise that schools do that exemplifies these structural injustices - in which students are told to stand at the starting line, ready to sprint forward.

Suddenly the teacher will interrupt and ask some of them to take a step backwards.

Those who sometimes go to bed hungry.

Those whose parents are unemployed.

Those with no books at home.

The girls.

It soon becomes evident that even the strongest runners among them have hardly any chance, simply because of where they had to start; for reasons they had no control over; for circumstances they were simply born into.

If the world is like the race I spoke of, then Copenhagen has allowed millions to take steps forward, but far too many remain stuck or have even fallen further back.

- 800 million people still live in extreme poverty.
- In some countries half of the girls do not even go to primary school.
- While unemployment has fallen to 5 percent—globally—this hides vast disparities: for instance, unemployment stands at less than 1 percent in some countries, yet it amounts to more than 30 percent in others.
- And young people remain three times more likely to be unemployed.
- This as women continue to earn just 78 cents for every dollar earned by men.

That is why this conference — this moment — truly matters.

To join forces in order to make life fair for everyone, regardless of the circumstances of your birth, or if you live in a region prone to natural disaster or conflict.

Allow me to make three points on our shared challenges—and shared opportunities—in delivering on social development.

First—we need to urgently address the single largest obstacle facing our pursuit of social development—the climate crisis.

We see it, time and again, in the wake of climate disasters that wipe out social services and GDP in just an instant.

Just last week, Hurricane Melissa barreled through the Caribbean, threatening millions of people and devastating social systems in the process.

Such disasters directly account for at least \$200 billion in annual losses; some estimates have this at \$2.3 trillion when other cascading costs are factored in.

These are schools, hospitals, livelihoods, all gone in an instant.

We are also seeing new epicentres of hunger and poverty emerging as a result of the climate crisis.

When I visited the Sahel region, I stood in 53-degree Celsius heat among sand and rocks — where, fifty years ago, cotton once grew.

Local farmers told me how the rains no longer come when they used to, the wells have run dry, the harvests have withered.

This is not just one farm, or one country—it is the new frontline of insecurity.

Rising temperatures are fuelling food crises globally.

If we continue like this, it is estimated that if the planet warms by more than two degrees – almost 200 million more people could face food insecurity.

And this threatens our entire sustainable development agenda, not just SDG 2 on Zero Hunger.

Hunger and poverty are also drivers of displacement, when families are forced to move because of lack of food.

And in turn, large-scale displacement puts pressure on neighbouring states, straining resources and testing governance, and often driving further insecurity.

Thus begins a vicious circle: climate insecurity leads to hunger and poverty; hunger and poverty spur displacement and conflict, and conflict deepens hunger and poverty once more.

Yet, on the positive side, we still have it in our power to reduce each future ton of CO2 emissions to change course now.

Fighting the climate crisis and ending hunger and poverty is not merely an act of charity, it is a matter of security and self-interest for all countries.

And that brings me to my second point—this Second World Summit for Social Development reminds us that in order to tackle these multi-dimensional issues, so too must our solutions and agendas be multi-dimensional and inter-connected.

The Doha Declaration, as well as the SDGs, call for holistic strategies because we cannot solve hunger in isolation from health, or poverty without addressing inequality, especially in education, or climate action without ensuring decent work.

They are not 17 separate goals, but rather an integrated framework where advancement in one area accelerates progress in others.

And these are not siloed agendas, they all underscore that human security is the foundation of global security.

Therefore, our most important task here in Doha, as well as next week at the Climate COP in Belem and throughout the whole 80<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly in New York, is to defend and recommit to this vision and to truly solve these cross-regional issues in a cross-regional manner.

Because in our deeply inter-connected world, no country or region can secure its interests in isolation – from energy security to supply chains to conflict mediation.

Take for example the attacks by the Houthis on cargo ships in the Red Sea that led to a heavy reduction in shipping traffic here in Gulf ports but also manufacturing lines that stood still in Europe.

Or the other way round, when due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, cargo ships full of grain could not leave the port of Odesa in the Black Sea, leading

to food insecurity and exploding food crises also here in this region, as in many other parts of the world.

These crises remind us that in this race to fight hunger and poverty, we are not competing against each other—we are running together, and a chain reaction that trips up one region will slow us all down.

Which brings me to my third point:

Recommitting to the SDGs means filling the \$4 trillion dollar resourcing gap, and reflecting these commitments in new trade agreements, in technology transfers, and in partnerships that create truly sustainable growth and not only benefit the few.

Because we know that one of the biggest problems is not the money as such, but rather how and where it is invested.

We have to ensure that these benefits reach everyone, everywhere

We need to create a global financial architecture that is fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, tackle debt burdens, boost international funds, and remove unnecessary restrictions that stifle innovation, as outlined in the Sevilla Commitment.

Public–private partnerships, if done right, can power homes and profits alike — reducing emissions while creating jobs, supporting hospitals, and electrifying schools.

Similarly, new technologies hold promise to deliver real solutions, providing another avenue for meaningful engagement with the private sector.

But also at the same time, this only holds true if we ensure that new innovations do not repeat old biases.

As just one example, when Apple launched its credit card in 2019, its algorithm systematically gave men higher credit limits than women.

This was not a technological fluke.

AI models that learn from societies with deeply entrenched discrimination against women risk amplifying those inequalities even further.

But the evidence is clear: everyone benefits when women are at the top designing, building, and creating these systems.

Equal representation of women will ensure that technology empowers, rather than exploits.

Again, this is not just a matter of doing what is right or what is just. It is a matter of self-interest for all of us.

Having men and women equally at the starting line of our new technological era will produce more innovative and representative products, ultimately increasing their profitability.

Men and women from all regions, especially from all developed and less developed countries.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We truly live in geopolitically challenging and fragmented times, and delivering on this Doha Declaration together in unity won't be easy.

But we should draw inspiration from those students, lining up for the race and even more from the millions out there they represent.

They never quit. Despite all the hurdles.

So too must we.

With the Declaration just adopted.

With the promises we made.

To level the playing field for all.

Once and forever.

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