Prepared by: IASC Secretariat

**Transcript: Deputy Secretary General, Jan Eliasson, at the IASC Working Group Meeting on 25 October 2016.**

Thank you very much. It is great to be with you. It was an offer I could not refuse when you asked me to speak to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. I was part of the creation when we worked on resolution 46/182. I did not know, as ambassador of Sweden at the time, that I was writing my future job description.

I have my heart in your work and your activities. When I look around the room I see many of you with whom I served, both at headquarters level and in the field - where I feel very much at home. After four and a half years serving under Ban Ki Moon, I am now returning to Sweden.

Kyung-wha, I can tell you that I have truly enjoyed working with you, with your great background both academically and in your earlier life. You have served the UN so well in both human rights and the humanitarian field. Thank you for this, and I am glad that you are leading the transition group for António Guterres.

I thought that I would just think out loud with you speaking freely, speaking informally. I am both looking back and looking forward while making some reflections that might be of interest to you.

As I said, I was there 25 years ago on the 18th December when Resolution 46/182 was gavelled. I did not know that the resolution would still be alive and kicking today even though there are some issues that need to be updated in a new world, I think, all-in-all, the structure was well set up. A group of ambassadors in the late 80s felt that we did not have a humanitarian mandate. We saw the Cold War end and we said to ourselves: we are going to have lots of convulsions inside countries. We already saw the signs of humanitarian crisis in Africa and elsewhere. We felt that the efforts in this area were so dispersed that we needed to formulate a humanitarian mandate that would bring together the elements of speedy reactions. We had a system in place for natural disasters, but we did not have a system in place for man-made disasters. I was chosen, as vice-president of ECOSOC, to prepare the ground for this resolution.

In the summer of 1991, we worked out a concept paper in Geneva which created the basis for me to go to the President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Shihabi at that time, and ask to set up an open-ended working group. We started in October of 1991 and we worked day and night intensively on all the aspects- the consent issues, the funding issues, and the need for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. All these things that are Pavlovian reflexes for you now were ground-breaking work at the time. To do that with the G77 and the EU in the room - and with the concerns that what we were doing in the humanitarian sector was seen as interference in internal affairs at the time - this was ground breaking. We had to ban the words “humanitarian intervention”. The French brought up the idea of “l’ingérence humanitaire.” We could say humanitarian action or assistance, but not intervention at that time. Kofi Annan used the term later, but in 1991 it did not work.

One of the things I found very interesting, and I really pushed for, was the “continuum between relief and development” which is a key subject of today. That is part of the resolution 46/182 - there are indeed a lot of things to pick out of that resolution.

I remember the work on the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). We had to get 50 million dollars in the first half year of 1992. I believe it is now at US$ 500 million and I find myself still trying to mobilize money.

I was proud of these efforts because we established not only a mechanism to deal with man-made humanitarian crisis, but we also sent a very basic message to put people in the centre. It may sound like a banality, but that is what it is all about in the end. If we lose this perspective, I think we lose the soul of the United Nations. At the end of the Cold War in 1991, we knew that we would be faced with growing tensions inside nations. So by putting the human being in the centre - no matter what religion or ethnicity, no matter what differences we may have, we as the UN must stand up for those basic values and principles. I also introduced the term “humanitarian imperative” to translate our determination to Member States. I also brought out the term “humanitarian diplomacy” in order to build a bridge to security and dealing with root causes, I think I negotiated the first humanitarian corridor in South Sudan back in 1992.

So with 46/182, we had a tool in our hands that was extremely useful, and you have a tool still. It is interesting to see what new dimensions the IASC and member states want to add to our humanitarian work.

I do not need to talk to you about the troubled world in which we work. I have tried to vaccinate myself to deal with the news I receive every morning at 6:30. It is usually bad news - colleagues, peacekeepers, humanitarian worker who have died, and the conflicts that just keep coming. The humanitarian consequences of today’s conflicts, with today’s weapons and today’s animosities, and of course the migrant and refugee flows. There is an added new element for displacement - namely in regard to the natural disasters that are related to climate change. I was in Vietnam and saw the sea taking over land in the Mekong Delta, an area where 18 million people live. If you translate this to the coasts of India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, you understand that we are going to have a huge flow of people - and it is already starting to happen right now. So all of these trends - migrants, refugees, climate change, together with extreme poverty - put enormous pressure on the humanitarian work of the UN.

Let us look at the costs of this: in my time as Emergency Relief Coordinator, I remember we were unhappy if we got less than 60 or 70 percent on the appeals, now you have to be satisfied if you get 40 or 50 percent. The total bill is somewhere between 20-25 billion dollars a year, isn’t it? And peacekeeping is about 8 billion dollars. So, every year, we spend about 28 billion dollars on the symptoms of the crises. We misunderstand our mission if we do not understand that the life-cycle of a conflict is much longer than CNN or even the Security Council may reflect. It has a long prevention stage and a long post-conflict stage.

I come back to the issue of sustaining peace, which is a great conceptual breakthrough for the UN. We are actually trained to deal with the first stage, which is Chapter Six: Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution. Most of us are also trained for post-conflict development work. Most of us are not trained to run peacekeeping operations.

So if this is a situation in the world in which we are almost losing control, we must think about how we develop the elements to deal with preventing this. This is another thing I am proud of. Kofi Annan and I sat down in August 2005 and there was a document that had been negotiated by my predecessor as President of the General Assembly. It was 170 paragraphs, and we said we must have a preamble of text that summarizes the UN’s mission. So that is where this formula came up: No peace without development, no development without peace, and none of the above without human rights. The interdependence between these three elements of the UN is absolutely crucial for us if we are to work successfully.

When I was a student, a professor told me, “First you get development, then you get peace, then you get human rights.” Even then I protested. If we do not deal with these elements at the same time, the whole structure falls apart, whether it is on an international level or in a nation. The three pillars have to be dealt with at the same time. If one of them is weak, the whole structure is weak. It translates immediately into crisis for all three. So we have this herculean task of working with all three at the same time. And we realize that we cannot do it on our own. We are not renaissance personalities. We have to build on the premise that everyone is doing his or her job in their own sector well. But the trick is to break down the walls between silos and realize that, to make a difference on the ground, we have to bring together our expertise with the expertise of others - whether it is in the peace and development areas or in human rights. We need a new mind-set and a cultural change to say to ourselves that the best agencies, the ones that are going to be successful in the future, will be those who are extremely good in what their mandates are but who also realize that specialization is only a part of finding the solutions and realities. It means we have to work horizontally.

This translates into a couple of conclusions: one is that humanitarian action and development should work together. I can give you an example of a situation where humanitarian assistance loaned itself not only to development, but to peace and security. I was Special Envoy on Darfur in 2007 and 2008. I was in the Darfur area when I met the leaders of the Fur tribe, I spent four hours convincing them to start the peace negotiations. They agreed, but they were very reluctant. We had lamb and broke bread under the Acacia tree. One of the older men came up to me and said, “We agree that we should go to these talks, but you first have to prove to us that peace is a better idea than war.”

Can you imagine that question? I looked at him, astonished and said, “Well, how can I prove that peace is better?” He claimed of course that Khartoum would never agree to wealth- sharing or power-sharing, so why not continue to fight? But to my question he said: “It’s very simple, when we come back from the peace talks and negotiations, we would like you to send someone here to our village where the militias threw a dead dog in the well so that half the population had to flee to the IDP camps. We want you to have someone here within six months to fix that well so that we can have drinking water and they can come back. Secondly, we would like to have a midwife; someone who saves our women from dying in childbirth. We have no safe water and we really want a midwife, can you fix that? Thirdly, when the boys come back from fighting we want to keep them busy, you can’t just have them run around here. Why don’t we build a road to this village 30 km away?”

I went to Brussels; I went to Washington with these very concrete demands that had to happen for me to prove that peace is better than war. I couldn’t deliver. This was to me a sign of the need to bring together humanitarian and development sectors. We should not have to divide up whether it is humanitarian money and mandates or whether it is development money and mandates. In other words: put the problem in the centre and then gather those around the problem who can do something about it. Then you reach an informal division of labour between different actors.

The last conclusion is: we need to work both with prevention and with post-conflict situations. Prevention is dealing with root causes. I often have to explain, as a humanitarian, that the ones who are the strongest on prevention are the ones who have seen the effects of conflict on the ground. You all who have seen the effects of war and despair know that prevention is necessary, and therefore you know we must be very active in dealing with root causes.

Another thing, which I also want to point to today, is the decay and the absolute disrespect that we see on humanitarian law and human rights. It is unacceptable that we have seen this disregard for so long now. It is not only about non-state actors and extremist groups. It is also member states and governments that do this. We have even come to the conclusion that, in some cases, it is even intentional. This is absolutely unacceptable. I sat with the President of the International Court yesterday and said we need a *cri de coeur* and we need a surge of knowledge and awareness surrounding this.

I remember telling the Security Council members two years ago when they were negotiating on Syria, “Are you aware that three or four of these paragraphs that you are negotiating in the Council are in fact part of the Geneva Conventions?” They didn’t seem to be aware that the issues they discussed were dealt with in The Geneva Conventions. I just wanted to leave that with you, I think that we should really mobilize the human rights community and others to stop this decay.

Now, the positive side. You have some tools that you can use. You have resolution 46/182. There are three other instruments that I want to point to. The first one is the Sustainable Development Goals that deal with the root causes of the problems that you meet every day. The more you see the SDGs as a tool and a vehicle to bring about the horizontal approach the better. If you put water as a problem in the centre, you realize - if that is done properly – that you improve child mortality, maternal health, education (particularly for girls), and through that, address gender equality and extreme poverty. If you use the older Millennium Development Goals, five of the goals were affected by water and sanitation programs. If you look at the timeline, you realize it is a preventative step to reach the SDGs as well as a post-conflict step. In other words, use these tools as your tools and use them to mobilize the system as One.

I also want to repeat the point, that those who are successful in the UN system are those who understand that they should be good in the silo, but also get the dynamic operation of others. Those who continue to keep on digging themselves into the ground will disappear into the ground.

So you have the 46/182 and you have the SDGs. Remember the SDGs are a new tool. We should commend the member states for not turning the SDGs into a lowest common denominator process. That means we have a high degree of expectation around the world. I am glad that in the Istanbul document you pushed so strongly for the SDGs as one of your five core responsibilities.

The other two tools are Human Rights up Front, and the Sustainable Peace. Remember, these are also new tools, and very important new tools.

On Human Rights up Front I do not need to go into great detail because I saw that you have a close colleague coming in later and he will talk about the elements of the initiative, not least the culture change and the operational change needed. I see it as one of the more important initiatives that I have been a part of since the Secretary General asked me to do after we received the Sri Lanka report in 2013. He asked me to roll this out with the help of Andrew Gilmour, the team on my floor, and the Human Rights up Front team. It has two dimensions that I think are of great importance for the whole UN and if we succeed we will achieve a qualitative step forward for the UN. The first dimension is that Human Rights up Front has demonstrated that all three pillars - development, peace, and human rights - should be dealt with and given the significance and the resources they need. The human rights side was not, and is not, given the resources they need, particularly from the regular budget. That was the human rights message for all of us. The human rights dimension is now part of the UN training programs. Everyone in the UN must be trained on the human rights dimension. I would also claim that people on the human rights side need to know the peace and security and development side as well. It is not just a one-way street; it is a two-way street for all of us. I can already feel it happening. I was glad I asked Helen Clark to be vice-chair in the Senior Action Group, which is the highest body for dealing with the cases we analyse. Going around the world, many or most of the Resident Coordinators understand the value and the importance of this initiative. I have had very good experiences of seeing how it has become a live concept in the country teams.

The other dimension comes from my background as a mediator in conflict resolution, both academically and diplomatically. I saw human rights violations as a very important indicator of crises to come. If you analyse crisis around the world you can see human rights violations as the first vibrations of conflict. A child doesn’t go to school because of her colour or her ethnic background, a father comes back tortured from prison, and so forth. My rhetorical question is: Why don’t we act at this stage of human rights violations rather than waiting for mass atrocities? We knew what would happen in certain situations - Cambodia, Rwanda - we saw it coming. The time of action was when it was almost uncontrollable. These genocides took an enormous human toll and caused huge damage to the UN; nights of sleep lost because we didn’t act early on it. So this is a very important way of saying, “Act at the preventative stage.”

If this initiative succeeds, it will be a great step forward for putting human rights on the level it deserves and secondly, we have a very good example of how prevention can work. I have talked about prevention since 1988 when I was an ambassador in New York. We brought prevention into different debates. Here, we have a very concrete way how to do it. Member States now growingly see the dangers; human rights violations almost always start inside a nation. But they also often fear interference in their internal affairs. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights should dispel that misconception. Member States should also realize that if human rights violation goes on, they can turn into mass atrocities, and they can turn into civil wars. And then what happens? The civil war can turn into proxy wars, regional wars. The worst example is, of course, Syria - which will not be solved without Russia, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey. Everyone needs to realize if we do not deal with human rights violations in the early stages, we pay a tremendous price with nations falling apart, opening up for proxy wars. So I would want to say to the Security Council, appealing to their logic, “Would you rather wait for this crisis to come to Council at the mass atrocities stage with the 28.5 billion dollar bill of humanitarian action and peacekeeping instead of acting now?” I am very glad that my friend and former colleague, António Guterres, has mentioned Human Rights up Front in his vision statement.

The last point, or tool if you will, is the Sustaining Peace Resolutions in the General Assembly and the Security Council. Sustaining Peace is a good concept because it really explains the process. It’s the early stage, it’s the conflict stage, it’s the post-crisis stage. It also says the same thing as the SDGs - it is related not only to peace, but it is related to development, institution building and human rights - which is again the horizontal approach.

So you have tools now in your hands- the 46/182, the Human Rights Up Front Initiative, the SDGs, the Sustaining Peace Resolutions, and the Istanbul Document - all of which have taken away the borders between peace, development and human rights agendas.

The final point that I am going to leave with you is to never forget what this organization is all about. We are a value-driven organization. We need to always be aware of the basic values for which we stand. Most of them are written into the Charter. If you want to see diplomatic poetry or legal poetry, read the Preamble of the Charter. I always recall the first three words of the charter which is “We the People.” We are here to serve The Peoples. We must try to do our best to give them peace, development, and human rights. We must fight hopelessness and despair. I have watched so many people die in front of me and I have seen so much suffering. I try to avoid becoming depressed, and I have tried to translate those feelings into another feeling - and that is anger. Anger is a very healthy feeling as it drives action. Of course you need to be controlled, you cannot show it too much, but you have to have that engine in you.

You also have to have a realistic approach to what you can achieve. I have a phrase when I talk to my colleagues, “We have to accept, unfortunately, the world as it is; but, we must never forget the world as it should be.” The world as it is means that we have to be the most sober, the most knowledgeable, the most hard-nosed when it comes to the analysis of situations. We cannot have rose-coloured glasses to look at a situation which is horrible. No, we must face up to it, and we must know it as it is. Then, our job is to work on the world as it should be.

I would say your job is to reduce the gap between the world as it is and the world as it should be. We will never be able to close the gap, but if we reduce it just one inch, just one centimetre, then we are achieving something. You have to spread the word to your constituencies that nobody can do everything, but everybody can do something. There is always some niche where we can be helpful and do good.

People always ask me how they can get a high level job in the UN. I tell them to try to do practical things like joining an organization they believe in or talk at the kitchen table to their children about these issues. There is so much you can do. We must make sure that we raise hope. We live in a world of dangerous polarization. We see it where we live, we see it in the US and in Europe, which has not been able to deal with the refugee crisis in a way modern democracies should.

So how do we organize? There are those that support identifying the world outside as a problem, and want to divide us, who thrive with fear being spread. If terrorists spread fear, they are met by political forces that thrive in that climate. We, the United Nations, with our values and principles, should now mobilize those good forces. I think what you did in Istanbul, what we did and the Refugee and Migration Meeting on September 19, is a way to say that the UN is there to remind all people of the values for which we must stand. I believe in the basic goodness of people. I think that people are waiting to be mobilized to do the right thing. We must accept that challenge and by that raise hope.

Thank you very much.