

Virtual Keynote Speech  
Webinar #18 of the FCC South Asia  
17:00 KST 17 September 2020 ([Live](#))

***1. Introduction***

Distinguished Journalists, Honored Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Namaste!

At the outset, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations.

My special thanks go to President of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia Mr. S Venkat Narayan for inviting me to speak at this meaningful event.

I am also grateful to my 50-year long friend and colleague of the UN, Ambassador Vijay Nambiar, Ambassador Bhaswati Mukherjee, and Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin for sharing valuable messages based on their rich experience.

I am pleased many online participants are joining us today from around the world. I deeply appreciate your high interest and support.

I believe a series of commemorative events of the UN's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, including this one, would present an opportunity to remind ourselves of the core mission of the UN and the very reason global leaders gathered to sign the UN Charter in San Francisco back in 1945.

## ***2. COVID-19 and the Decline in Multilateralism***

Ladies and gentlemen,

COVID-19 has shone a light on the limitations of multilateralism and international governance. To design a new sustainable future, a paradigm shift in strategic thinking and the according practices are desperately needed.

Indeed, COVID-19 is expected to leave a more appalling impact on global society, even when compared to the September 11 Terrorist Attacks and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. It can be said as the worst global crisis since World War II.

While the consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak require a global response, multilateralism is in disarray. Advanced countries, including the US and Europe, are putting their own interests over shared interests. This trend is posing a serious threat to multilateralism and rules-based international order that have served as a strong foundation for global governance over decades.

Essential instruments of international cooperation are being challenged, and unilateralist momentum is on the rise. This is causing even graver challenges in developing countries, socially, economically, and politically.

### ***3. UN's Mission***

This chaotic time requires the UN to step up and raise its voice to take the lead. But it seems that we are on the opposite path.

Since many world leaders and experts will be drawing lessons and meanings from the past 75 years of UN's work, today, I would like to share my personal experience and views from a former Secretary-General's perspective.

### ***4. Personal Experience***

Ladies and gentlemen,

Born in the era under Japanese rule, I lived through the Korean War and severe famine. At that time, I witnessed firsthand how much support Korea had received from the international community, led by the UN, especially in terms of military and economic assistance. These experiences made me always dream of becoming a diplomat one day to serve my country and contribute to the international community.

## ***5. Paris Agreement and SDGs Adoption***

As I look back on my 10 years at the UN, there is no doubt that the two most greatest accomplishments during my term are adoptions of the Paris Climate Change Agreement and 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The historic Paris Accord was adopted based on our mutual consensus that climate change is a life-or-death issue for not only humanity but also our Mother Earth. All member states came to agree that we must create a sustainable future where humanity and nature can coexist. To that end, we set a lofty goal of keeping the climate promise and making green efforts in a concerted manner.

SDGs were designated to tackle 17 most pressing universal problems that humanity must overcome, including poverty, disease, education, refugees, climate change, energy, environmental pollution, water and others.

Now that 5 years have passed since the unanimous adoption on September 25, 2015, I should challenge you all by asking, how far have we come in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and SDGs achievement. Regrettably, I cannot say that we have met our expectations.

However, there are people who are wholeheartedly devoting their life to achieve these ambitious goals even at this very moment.

### ***6. Refugees and Peacekeeping***

Being closely associated with many of the 17 Goals, the refugee crisis is particularly important as it is directly aligned with human dignity.

During my term, I witnessed refugee crises all over the world from the Middle East to Africa to Asia. When I visited refugee camps in Somalia, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon, Kenya, and South Sudan, I could not help but shed tears at their miserable reality.

The two most primary reasons these refugees have to flee their homes are regional conflict and climate change. To resolve these problems and help them to humanely lead a normal life, the UN has been dispatching over 100,000 peacekeepers to most conflict-ridden countries around the world.

India is one of the big contributing countries in the world. More than 200,000 Indian troops have served in 49 of the 71 PKOs deployed so far. During the Korean War in 1950s, 60 Parachute Field Ambulance of the Indian Army were sent to provide medical support.

Thus, peacekeeping is one of the most visible activities of the UN. It is not mentioned anywhere in the UN Charter, but I've always underscored peacekeeping as a flagship activity. Every day, UN peacekeepers cover a wide range of duties from resolving conflicts to bringing justice to providing food and shelter to building infrastructure. I have seen firsthand how they make a real difference in people's lives.

### *7. Pandemic and Climate Change*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Historically, major viral outbreaks, such as the Spanish Flu, H1N1, SARS, Ebola, and MERS, have all been caused by the transmission of viruses to humans from wild animals whose habitats were encroached upon by human activity. This indicates that further destruction of the natural ecosystem will only accelerate the occurrence and frequency of viral outbreaks.

In the meantime, we have also learned that we still can turn the tide. As countries around the world forcefully stopped almost all human activities to slow the viral infections, we started to enjoy blue skies more often.

Climate change progresses in a more subtle and gradual way compared to COVID-19, but its impact is incomparably more disastrous. In fact,

we are already encountering more extreme weather events of a greater scale, including heatwaves, storms, wildfires, and floods, more often than we used to.

These weather extremities alongside the viral outbreak are daunting enough to make change in our thoughts. Think about what would happen if there are water and food shortages to the global economy, politics, and security. We must consider the present moment a second chance to heed nature's warning and work together to avoid devastating consequences worse than COVID-19.

Therefore, we must tackle climate change and implement SDGs as a pressing agenda. Countries may be tempted to ease regulations on industries based on fossil fuels in the name of rapid economic recovery. Some may recklessly use up the resources that were once set aside for climate and environmental protection in the name of expansionary fiscal policy.

However, the conventional growth paradigm geared towards economic development is unsustainable. To turn crisis into opportunity and ensure a sustainable future, there should be a paradigm shift in strategic thinking.

Noting that we are the members of the global society with a shared destiny, we must build back better, based on mutual trust and solidarity. The global response system should be based on openness, solidarity, and cooperation, not self-serving interests, discrimination, and hatred. Temporary lockdowns cannot be the solution.

### ***8. Preparations for the Post-Coronavirus Era***

In this light, as the former Secretary-General, I would like to highlight three points with regard to shoring up multilateralist values and reshaping international cooperation to be braced for the post-coronavirus era.

First, the international community should make united efforts to contain the health crisis so that it does not escalate into economic or security crises. To that end, trade barriers should be lowered and markets should be kept open to ensure the movement of goods and services. Also, financial safety nets should be strengthened, particularly for developing countries.

Second, we should reinforce our response capacity through the revamp of the international governance system. We should establish an international governance system designated for global crisis response. As a permanent body, the system should consist of specialized agencies and related organizations of the UN, including the WHO Office at the

UN, World Bank, and IMF, to ensure its effective and immediate operation in a state of emergency.

Last but not least, we should interlink climate change with healthcare, and harness innovative technologies in response to the global crises.

### ***9. Conclusion***

Distinguished members of Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia, Ladies and Gentlemen,

After leaving office in December 2016, I have been dedicated to promoting multilateral values by serving several posts. For instance, I established and have been managing the operation of Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens in Vienna and Ban Ki-moon Foundation for Better Future in Seoul. Internationally, I am currently serving as the Deputy Chair of the Elders, Chair of the Boao Forum for Asia, President and Chair of the Global Green Growth Institute, Chair of the Global Center on Adaptation, and Chairman of the IOC Ethics Committee, to name a few. I wish that my experience at the UN could contribute to a more hopeful future of the international community.

Let me conclude with a beautiful poem by the 12th-century Indian philosopher and poet Basavanna.

*“Listen, O lord of Kudalasangama,  
things standing shall fall,  
but the moving ever shall stay.”*

The United Nations has encountered many moments of frustration and disappointment. The world today is constantly challenged by a newly evolving threat. Yet, this is also the reason for the UN to stay vigilant and renew its commitment to fulfilling the cause.

Through reform, the UN will be able to promote universal values, including peace, human rights, and freedom, that the founders have envisaged 75 years ago. Let us not lose hope and continue to step up our efforts for the common future.

Thank you.

Dhanyawad.

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