TOWARD SUSTAINABLE PEACE BUILDING

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First, I would like to express my pleasure of being here at this important conference that defends life against arms, war, and death.

The worst thing that could happen is when someone, somewhere in this world, is able to find a bullet but cannot find a piece of bread. Thousands of people in different parts of the world left their jobs and occupations becoming soldiers in meaningless wars. This, of course, makes the world less safe. A place that is congested with weapons is certainly not a safe place.

All of us know that the world is currently facing huge and complicated problems, with the most prominent being the failures in all aspects of development. Undoubtedly, such consecutive failures have contributed to the increasing levels of political instability, wars, and armed conflicts.

There is an obvious link between increase in military expenses and decline in education, health, housing, as well as low investment levels and poor job creation. Countries that give high priority to armaments often fail in achieving the goal of sustainable development.

According to the estimates by groups specialized in monitoring armament phenomena, what is spent on arms (deals) annually through what is claimed to be legal means is about US$ 2 trillion, while the illegal trade of arms is worth US$ 60 billion. This money is sufficient to build international sustainable peace, identify all causes of the crisis, and prevent them, especially because wars are mainly attributable to poverty and lack of development. Furthermore, this
money is sufficient to implement all programs needed to protect the environment and ensure the preservation of life on our planet.

We cannot progress toward a common safe future without taking such measures; otherwise, humankind will someday find itself obliged to do so.

We need a great humanistic struggle for a constructive, more equitable, and positive globalization where resources would be shared by everyone; a globalization where fruitful products would be enjoyed by all, instead of a passive globalization that benefits some while others have to bear the brunt of its negative impacts. Only few countries are not at risk of being monopolized by rich countries, corporations, and individuals, whereas devastating consequences impact the growing number of the poor and jeopardize mother earth, and in turn our safety and future.

Our goal of ensuring international peace and safety for all, as well as security for our common future is crucial. It is not a matter of a luxurious additional measure. One day humanity with all its states, nations, and diverse communities will be forced to do so; otherwise, the door is wide open to hell.

All countries have the right to purchase an adequate amount of weapons to defend their sovereignty, and I do not insist on full disarmament, or close down of weapons factories once and for all. Such a demand, although logical, might look naïve, and may incite sarcasm. However, we need to combat the illegal trade of weapons as the first step, and then, in general, armament should be minimized to end the arms race.

For nuclear disarmament, we also need to move forward to save humanity and planet earth from the consequences of the use of such weapons whose evils and risks humanity cannot bear.

A comprehensive revision of policies in certain countries and some communities is a crucial, necessary demand; otherwise, nothing will remain for development, or for combating poverty, starvation, or disease. We need to to choose between the two paths: more expenditures either on weapons and war or on development. It is for us to decide.

Former US President Eisenhower is believed to have said:

> Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. t is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in more than 30 cities.

However, this insight voiced by Eisenhower has not brought about any notable change toward reducing US military expenditure and military industry. On the contrary, an arms race erupted to be among the ugliest manifestations of the Cold War between the capitalist and communist powers.

Although the Cold War ended in the early 1990s, some still think on the same logic: weapons first and foremost. Only in the second place they think about issues such as medicines, bread, education, art, and the rest. It is very unfortunate that even poor countries apply the same logic, believing that
purchasing weapons is more important than education, fight against crime, and keeping students in schools.

Superpowers, particularly US and Russia and other big countries, which should be concerned with safeguarding international peace, rather make a serious mistake by selling weapons to tyrannical and despotic regimes. Most of these regimes fail to honor their development responsibilities and are often corrupt. Cooperation with such regimes is like partnering with them in stealing the wealth of their people and committing crimes and violations against these people.

Growth in arms trade indicates that the arms manufacturers and traders have no intention to stop feeding armed conflicts and preventing any equitable solutions. Nothing is worse than states behaving like greedy arms dealers, whose only concern is to accumulate money.

Success in arms trade and failure on the development front increase the risks and pose a threat to international peace and security, particularly among fragile states in underdeveloping countries. It further increases the influence by armed groups that strive to control and dominate in accordance with their own self-interests.

If we want a more stable world, then we have to follow the path of development and combat poverty, unemployment, and crime. We should not allow and accept arms dealers to decide our path, as this would lead to more fighting, poverty, and crimes. Everyone should live on the planet with peace, security, safety, dignity, and welfare, but such principles and values would never exist as long as arms exist.

If we want a more stable and just world, we have to follow the path of achieving justice. There can be no peace without justice. Today, peace within nations is no less urgent than peace between nations. With the support of international powers, bloodthirsty dictators terrorize the people of their country, particularly in the Arab regions, a matter which is exploited and misused by terrorist groups, who abuse their religious faith. Every dictator in this region is a terrorist, and every terrorist is a dictator. So there will be no path to holy peace that we aspire until dictators are swept away from the region, and terrorists are prevented from abusing our religion.

Five years ago, amidst the Arab Spring revolutions and at a time when our states were like military garrisons, we were dreaming of a civil state. At that time, the regimes pursued a policy of militarizing our communities and preventing civil movements from any progress toward central issues such as development, freedom, and civil and political rights.

We still adhere to our dream, for which we have sacrificed a lot. Arab people still continue their struggle and will combat counter-revolutions that have been aided by international forces. Arab people have refused every attempt of use of military against civil populations, have rejected the intimidation by terrorism to the detriment of democracy, and any misuse of arms to impede development progress, and will never accept any of these.

In my country, Yemen, our society is militarized. Purchasing a weapon is much easier than purchasing a computer or a camera. There are no accurate statistics on the number of arms in Yemen, whose population is around 20 million
people. Estimates, however, suggest that there are some 60 million arms; an average of three weapons per person.

Former President Saleh’s regime failed to achieve development in the country. His continuous amendments to the Constitution to allow for longer periods in power have led to wide protests, culminating in the revolution on February 11, 2011. There was no other option.

The overthrown president Saleh and the Houthi militia, who refused to accept the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), bear full responsibility for everything that is happening in Yemen. They staged a bloody coup against the legitimate power, and held the government and the legitimate president under house arrest. It is unacceptable to assume power by force.

The international community should help Yemenis in building a genuine peace that leads to genuine development. This cannot be attained without dissolving and disarming the militia and all other nonstate actors and restricting the possession of arms to the state alone.

Our stand against the Houthi militia is mainly owing to the fact that they are an armed group that undermines the state’s sovereignty and practices terrorism against its opponents. One cannot imagine of going into elections under the presence of an armed group that adopts a racial creed, believes in the right to rule because they are Ali bin Taleb’s grandchildren — the husband to one of the Prophet’s daughters — and that anyone who is not from this family line has no right to even think of ruling this country.

We are against these militias because they are incompatible with equal citizenship and civil state, rather insist on keeping weapons looted from military camps or obtained from Iran, which is playing a negative role in the region, particularly in Yemen.

The role played by the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE is no less terrifying than the one of the Houthi’s backed by Iran. Abu Dhabi and Riyadh, which claim they have intervened in Yemen to help the legitimate authority, create and support anti-government-armed militias. Reliable reports, including reports by the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, are very clear in this regard. The Arab coalition is apparently planning to cause more destruction in the country, as nothing points to the opposite or explains the Saudi-Emirati’s insistence on establishing anti-authority-armed groups.

To stop the war in Yemen and build sustainable peace, we have to disarm both the militia and nonstate-armed groups and ensure that the possession of arms falls only within the domain of the state. We need to prepare the ground for free and fair elections and hold the referendum on the new constitution, which was drafted with the participation of all parties and agreed upon by all delegates in the NDC. Unfortunately, the Houthi militia and Saleh prevented this referendum from being held through their coup.

To achieve transitional justice, there is a need for a national reconciliation to bring justice to the perpetrators and ensure that such violations are not repeated. Further, there is a need to develop a reconstruction plan in rebuilding what the war had destroyed, as well as to achieve reforms and economic growth, which are crucial for successful political change.
All of these should be associated with a ceasefire in Yemen. I call for an immediate ceasefire and urge all of you in this important conference to help in this endeavor and work hand-in-hand with us to achieve our people’s aspiration to move toward a prosperous future — a future of freedom and dignity. We all are a part of this world, and our security, as I believe, concerns the world.

If we succeed in achieving these steps, we could then speak about development. But with the presence of arms outside state control, all we can speak about is the number of victims, killings, and violations everywhere.

I know that we, as Yemenis, bear a great part of the responsibility. The solution must start with our own understanding that arms and the behavior of the militia contradict development and economic prosperity. I know this, and I hope that we have already learnt a lesson from this war and are finally ready to leave the language of violence and strive for a decent life.

Although this is our responsibility, it does not take away everyone’s duty to help Yemeni people overcome their ordeal.

The relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council on Yemen should be implemented. Yemeni issues should be dealt with more seriously. Everyone who visits Yemen says that we are a tolerant people, and all the people of the West who wrote about Yemen also confirm this fact.

At the end, allow me to thank you and wish all of you a successful conference. I also pray that peace will come to my country Yemen, to Syria, Libya, and all other parts of the world.