

“Building effective and sustainable partnerships”

**Keynote Address to the Dubai International Humanitarian Aid
and Development Conference (DIHAD)**

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Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and privilege for me to be here with you at the opening of the 10th DIHAD conference and to address a topic that is at the heart of humanitarian and development work – building effective and sustainable partnerships.

I would like to thank His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, as well as Her Royal Highness Princess Haya bint Al Hussein, for the patronage of this key event. In the ten years since its inception, DIHAD has grown into an event of global importance, bringing together international organizations, governments, think tanks, universities and businesses working in the humanitarian and development field all over the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

None of the major humanitarian and development goals – be it to eliminate poverty, foster education and health care, rebuild communities destroyed by war, or help the victims of humanitarian crises – can be achieved in isolation. These tasks go far beyond what any single agency or government can do. They require us to join together the diverse expertise, resources and networks of a wide variety of partners. This is particularly true in today’s global context, which presents ever-growing challenges for humanitarian and development efforts.

In recent years, there has been a multiplication of violent crises. In 2012 alone, millions of people fled fighting in Syria and Mali, Sudan and the DRC. And things are getting worse – just since the beginning of this year, we have already registered some 600,000 new refugees from Syria alone.

But as new crises multiply, old ones seem to never die. Conflicts are becoming more intractable, and sustainable political solutions are rare, leaving millions of refugees unable to return home to countries like Afghanistan or Somalia.

The international community has shown limited capacity for the prevention and timely resolution of conflicts. In the past, there was never a true global governance system, much less a democratic one, but there were clear power relations. Today, we still do not have an effective global governance system, but power relations have become unclear.

As a result, conflicts emerge where they are least expected. Unpredictability has become the name of the game. Violence erupts, often under the most chaotic of circumstances, wreaking havoc and tearing whole societies apart.

And in the absence of a strong and effective international consensus aimed at their prevention and early resolution, new crises multiply and chronic ones persist. The humanitarian consequences are increasingly dramatic.

On top of this, a number of major global trends interact to make the world even more complex. These include population growth, rampant urbanization, the hazardous effects of climate change, and competition for scarce resources such as food and water. These megatrends not only have an aggravating effect on conflict, but also create enormous challenges for social and economic systems and the environment.

As a result of the combination of these factors, the challenges facing humanitarian and development actors now and in the future are immense. Partnership will be key to tackling them. As our partnerships grow broader and more diverse, they will benefit from the fact that the values underpinning efforts to assist the vulnerable are shared across all major religions and cultures.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me elaborate on a few types of partnerships that are particularly important in terms of what they can achieve for the people we care for.

Firstly, there are partnerships with governments, and the UAE itself provides us with some strong examples. Following the vision of its founder, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the UAE has grown into an increasingly strong actor and partner for humanitarians in the past decade. Here in Dubai, the International Humanitarian City, under the leadership of Her Royal Highness Princess Haya, has become the world's largest and busiest logistics hub for humanitarian aid, with nine UN agencies and 44 NGOs and companies as members. This landmark initiative sets an example for humanitarian logistics and benefits many hundreds of thousands of people in need every year. In the case of my own organization, UNHCR, the

International Humanitarian City houses the largest in our global network of stockpiles. It allows us to provide life-saving assistance for up to 350,000 displaced people from this location alone, and all of the major UNHCR relief operations of recent years have been serviced at least in part from Dubai.

Second, there are the partnerships with NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. These are the backbone of humanitarian work, and UNHCR is no exception with over 750 NGO and Red Cross/Red Crescent partners worldwide. This is a very diverse range of partners, and we are closely engaged with them to review the quality of our collaboration and ensure our partnership brings the benefits we want to obtain together for our people of concern.

An issue that deserves particular attention is the capacity-building of local partners. National NGOs and community-based organizations – including very often faith communities like local mosques and churches – are usually the first to respond, and they remain long after international organizations leave. They have local expertise, know what their communities need, and what they can do themselves. We have to better engage local organizations to allow them to contribute fully, while reinforcing their capacity to coordinate and collaborate with multilateral mechanisms. This also requires international donors to give small national partners more flexibility and training on accountability requirements, and, eventually, to support the transition to local entities.

Third, there are the growing partnerships with the private sector. In addition to being an important source of funding for humanitarian operations, they also pave the way for innovation and technical excellence in humanitarian and development assistance. International organizations and NGOs often struggle with innovation, since they lack the capacity to invest in research or new technologies. But this does not mean the modalities and technologies of humanitarian and development assistance should lag behind the reality of the world today. We need to find more efficient, more impactful ways to deliver assistance.

At UNHCR, for example, we benefit from the expertise, training and research support of a broad range of private sector partners. The IKEA Foundation has helped us to develop an innovative new transitional shelter model. Our partnership with UPS gives us access to their logistics expertise and emergency support capacity in transporting relief items. UNHCR also collaborates with Microsoft and HP to provide refugees with IT equipment and training. There are certainly many more examples of successful partnerships with the private sector, and the DIHAD conference is an excellent opportunity for exchanging innovative solutions and forging new partnerships.

Finally, there is the partnership within the UN system. The past decade has seen considerable efforts to strengthen inter-agency coordination across the UN, to make our interventions faster, more efficient, and more sustainable. Complementing these mechanisms, strong bilateral partnerships exist between various agencies, such as in the case of UNHCR, our relationships

with the World Food Programme and with UNICEF. We also actively participate in efforts led by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator to strengthen inter-agency response in internal displacement emergencies. UN agencies increasingly plan, fundraise and implement jointly, to ensure resources are used most effectively and address the most urgent needs.

We also advocate for closer partnership between humanitarian and development actors. In post-conflict and transition situations, humanitarian actors are usually the first to intervene, but we lack the resources and the expertise required to lay the foundations for sustainable development. Our efforts to draw in development actors, with their longer planning horizon, more substantial resources, and technical expertise, are challenging, but they must continue. UNHCR has been engaging closely with development actors such as UNDP and the World Bank, to facilitate durable solutions in transition situations such as East Sudan or Colombia. There are many more examples of such partnerships, and we must find ways of strengthening them further.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now briefly turn to a current example of the importance of partnership, one that is present in all of our minds. The violence in Syria is causing the worst refugee crisis of the 21st century, and it is the most complex and dangerous conflict facing the world today. There are now nearly 1.2 million registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt, and the crisis has been accelerating at a staggering pace. Daily arrival figures averaged 3,000 people in December, 5,000 in January, and 8,000 in February. In recent weeks, there were several days with as many as 14,000 people crossing the borders into neighboring countries in the space of 24 hours.

As long as no political solution is found, we as humanitarian agencies are struggling to mitigate the human suffering and to assist those who are hosting the refugees. The enormous task of assisting them challenges us in terms of the whole range of our partnerships, and far beyond.

The humanitarian response effort is closely coordinated between host governments, UN agencies and NGOs. For assistance to the refugees, UNHCR leads the coordination of nearly 60 agencies in the host countries. Our Regional Refugee Response Plan is now being revised to take into account the staggering refugee numbers, and it will also include the needs of the hosting countries. The government and charities of the UAE have been very engaged in their assistance to Syrian victims, such as the work done by the UAE Red Crescent or the Khalifa Foundation. Efforts must continue to strengthen the coordination and joint planning of the different interventions, so as to direct resources where they are needed most urgently and will have the highest impact.

Governments must also work in partnership to respond to the humanitarian, political and security challenge of the Syrian crisis. At the regional level, support is most urgently needed to help the countries hosting Syrian refugees – in particular Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, whose capacities are stretched to the limit. The Gulf countries have an important partnership role to play in this effort, both bilaterally and through regional organizations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I must mention one category of partners which is often overlooked – that is, the people we are working to protect and assist. Beneficiaries are not only at the receiving end of effective partnerships, they are an integral component of making partnerships work. Our objective must be to empower them to become true partners in our planning, programming, implementation and evaluation of development and humanitarian interventions. Only then can we be sure that what we do takes into account not only the needs, but also the capacities and ideas of our persons of concern.

With that in mind, I look forward to this conference and wish you interesting and thought-provoking discussions.

Thank you very much.