Serageldin Closing Remarks 6th Global Baku Forum 17 03 2018

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**Closing Remarks**

By

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On

Bridging Gaps to Create Inclusive Societies

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

What a range of topics we have covered! What a collection of issues we have discussed! And in the tradition of the Global Baku Forum, we eschewed speeches and media sound-bites, and favored instead the thoughtful, candid and reflective comment, which advances our mutual understanding and which sheds light on the dark corners of our perpetual challenges.

We started with a review of **the Big Powers**. Their own vision of the world and their interpretation of the challenges they face largely determine both posture and attitude. Thus for those who view the very presence of others as existential threats, a feeling of victimization will prevail and yield a highly suspicious and defensive attitude. But for the many smaller regional powers and the small countries of today, the emergence of a multi-polar world would appear more desirable than the hegemony of one super-power.

Yet our discussions pointed out that such cold-war type of discourse and terminology is inadequate for our times. Surely “Soft Power” is as important as military and economic clout. In addition, to be able to help other countries to solve their problems outside of your own borders is a measure of the true power of nations, not just the capacity to impose a solution on weaker nations.

Indeed, it is a general observation that we are moving from a moment when the hegemonic powers wanted to shape the internal regimes of various countries to a period when the emerging world order is valuing non-interference and even “no lecturing”. But some of us were afraid that this would constitute a retreat from the defense of human rights and the obligation to protect Human Rights which had made much headway since the Universal Declaration of Human rights in 1948.

But if the emerging New World Order was to evolve into the search for win-win solutions, so much the better. Yet, interests do not always align, and conflicts are likely to continue to occur. There really will be no substitute for the system of international laws and the institution of the UN, which despite its many faults and the continuing inability to reform the structures inherited from The Second World War remains the only forum that has global legitimacy. It is still the most likely guardian of a value-based community of nations.

But **Rising Powers** will want to have a bigger role to play on the international scene, and tensions will continue as we seek to promote peace and amity between nations. Regional groupings will probably become more accentuated, but the role of the Bog Powers will remain dominant. Frozen conflicts will need to see some advances towards solutions. The sclerosis in the global machinery of conflict resolution will need to evolve dynamically if we are to accommodate emerging powers, and retain a global multilateral system of international affairs. Personally, I believe that the specialized agencies of the UN system have done much to promote their acceptability, while the Bretton Woods system – despite its recurrent updates – continues to chafe many of the emerging powers, although nothing compared to the Security Council structure inherited form 1945.

But within our national borders, we are increasingly witnessing the rise of tensions between **Majorities and Minorities**. Regretfully, in many countries, we not only witness a rise in authoritarianism, but also demands for separatism and the populist rhetoric of politicians devoted to the politics of exclusion and fear, which has made immigration a “hot issue” in practically every country. Our commitment to inclusive societies requires more than shaky power-sharing agreements. We explored many of the existing situations, and we did find them wanting. However, most participants were cognizant that minorities and majorities will continue to exist no matter how many times you would split a nation, and that therefore the solution is to strengthen inclusion, provide adequate reflection of identity from minority language to special schools, and deliver real participation in decision making and resource sharing.

Places like the current **Middle East and North Africa** where violence is raging from Libya to Somalia to Yemen to Syria and Iraq, has exposed gaps between minorities and majorities as well as deep cleavages that impede peaceful coexistence of ethnic and religious communities on these territories. Thee tensions have opened the way for regional powers to confront each other in proxy wars, within the shadows of the great powers. We explored ways in which we might craft stability for this embattled region.

We also looked at **the Balkans**. The last century has been one of violence with Sarajevo an emblematic name from the start of the First World War to the Yugoslav war at the end of the last century. Can the ethnic and religious identities be reconciled in a framework of regional security to maintain peaceful coexistence and economic prosperity? Wise leadership will have to overcome the tensions that are just below the surface in a number of Balkan countries as they design their future with – perhaps – new models of relationships with Europe and Russia.

But whatever the overall views that participants held, we all acknowledged **the emergence of China** on the world scene, not just as an economic superpower but as a great political and military power as well, whose foreign policy will have its impact both regionally and globally. In the light of the consolidation of political power in China in the last few weeks, we tried to better understand the interests that drive China’s foreign policy goals and in that context to explore how the international community must work with China to create global equilibrium and inclusive societies.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

No discussion at a global Forum would be complete without looking at the **prevalent economic system** and its corollaries, from Global Trade to environmental Impacts. With the return of supra-nationalist trade policies and the continuing impacts of economic activity on the environment, especially in terms of Climate change, the existing economic order need some correctives. These include everything from recognizing the rising inequalities in almost all societies, and the persistent flaws in the measurement of GDP/GNP. Yet as we searched for the new directions that would incorporate well-being and people’s welfare into the heart of the economic paradigm, the participants were conscious of the need to act on a broad range of policies if the world was to effectively pursue the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Accords on Climate Change.

This year we were privileged to have a group of **Young Leaders** who shared their vision of the challenges that they see, and their insights as to possible solutions to these challenges. It was a most impressive performance that combined exceptional maturity with a well-prepared and well-presented interactive session with the Forum Participants.

In addition, I am delighted that this year we have had a special panel to deal with the rising issues of **Science and political decision making**. The world is increasingly complex and the role of science in understanding that world is irreplaceable. A vigorous and dynamic science establishment is essential to understanding and acting upon our contemporary challenges from the likely impacts of climate change to the likely dangers of weapons of war, from assessing the safety of new products and technologies to the promotion of scientific breakthroughs in health, agriculture or engineering. We need scientifically based policies and evidence based regulation. Yet there are still many questions about how to organize the fruitful interlinks of science for policy and policy for science, especially with the emergence of the private sector as a dominant force in both the undertaking of research to the proprietorship and deployment of new technologies, to the use and possible misuse of massive data sets on all aspects of the lives of citizens. I believe that we all recognized that there is much to be done to better organize the relations between the scientists and both the public and private sectors, and to ensure that scientific realities do not become political footballs, but do help an enlightened electorate to support wise decisions from the policy-makers.

Finally, we recognized that the world is also divided around **religious and cultural divides**, and we searched for the best means of encouraging dialogue and mutual understanding, and the role that political leadership must play to overcome these gaps rather than exacerbate them.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have indeed covered an enormous array of issues in our last three days. So in this long journey of discussion and discovery, of exploration and reflection, we searched and hopefully we found, not the magic bullet or the miracle cure, but the fundamental point of balance within ourselves, that commitment to the values that would help guide our actions away from conflict, war and misery to neighborliness, peace and prosperity… it is the values we attach to inclusion and participation of minorities and to the pursuit of the ideal of truly inclusive societies. Indeed, in the words of T.S. Eliot:

We shall not cease from exploration,

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

– T.S. Eliot

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Looking forward to seeing you all here in Baku next year, I am honored to declare the sixth Global Baku Forum adjourned, and to wish you safe journeys home.

xxxx END xxxx