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Good morning, everyone. Your excellencies, distinguished guests, and speakers, ladies and gentlemen: it is an honour to address you once again, and to welcome you to the United Arab Emirates. We are thrilled to open our doors for the 16th edition of the World Policy Conference in Abu Dhabi for the third time. This conference has been a cornerstone of our annual calendar for the past three years, as it continues to foster and drive forward insightful dialogue and discussion on a wide variety of issues, challenges and opportunities, all led by foremost thinkers, leaders, and dear colleagues.

Your considerable expertise, forged across years of dedicated service in every field imaginable, will assist in creating the kind of open, honest, and meaningful discussions and spirited debates we have come to expect and enjoy from the World Policy Conference. We must never pass up an opportunity to learn from one another. As we strive to do so every year, the organizers have gathered together an impressive group of attendees and speakers, so that we might better understand the most pressing issues of today and tomorrow. It is important that we discuss these topics, because as challenging as 2022 proved to be, 2023 has proven even more so.

Before we start, we must acknowledge the devastating events happening in our region. Since the war in Gaza broke out, we express our deepest condolences for the loss of civilian lives, and our thoughts go to those who have lost loved ones as a result of this conflict. Tragically, the loss of civilian lives in Gaza continues to this day. The ongoing damage being perpetrated upon the people has created a humanitarian catastrophe that is unfolding before our very eyes in real time.

We are working relentlessly to reach an immediate and full humanitarian ceasefire, so that life saving aid can be delivered to the Gaza strip. Every effort must be made to protect civilians and to immediately put an end to this conflict, which we are witnessing as the result of a decades long failure to make progress towards a political horizon that ends the occupation and brings peace to both Palestinians and Israelis alike. As we continue working to stop this war, we cannot ignore the wider context and the necessity of turning down the regional temperature that is approaching a boiling point. The risk of regional spillover and further escalation is real, as is the risk that extremist groups will take advantage of the situation to advance ideologies that will keep us locked in cycles of violence.

Therefore, as our region is facing a critical test today, we must also consider the wider problem of extremism and terrorism within and across societies. Extremism brings no peace to the world. It is a scourge that is not home to any particular religion or country. We must use all the tools available and the wisdom accrued through often painful lessons to solve this shared challenge. Ladies and gentlemen, recent events in the Middle East, including the situation in Gaza, other ongoing conflicts, and simmering socio economic cleavages across the region and the wider world necessitate strong diplomacy and cooperation among us. This is also the case with the war in Ukraine, which continues to be embattled, causing further polarization on the geopolitical front and affecting the global economy and food security.

We have largely recovered from the Covid 19 pandemic, but there is much concern, as there should be, on what we will do when the next pandemic occurs. Artificial intelligence has entered the mainstream and impacts our daily lives, while climate change makes itself felt more each year. As all that is going on in the world continues to undergo systematic change as new players emerge, the old order comes under strain and calls for a more inclusive world order to find more space for discussion.

We have our work cut out for us. Despite all of this, there are clear opportunities for all countries and actors to seize, if they possess the political will and courage. And so, we embark on this path. I want to



assure you that the United Arab Emirates will remain a true partner and a bridge builder. We are committed to upholding aspirations of peace and prosperity for all in a real and practical way, because in the modern world, crises have far reaching implications for all of us.

This also applies to the greatest long term threat to humanity: climate change. Though climate change is often discussed, it is time that we take stock of our progress and make sure we are heading where we need to go. The UAE is proud to host COP28 this year in only a few weeks, which underscores the seriousness with which we will treat this issue.

We have striven to be a leader in our efforts, but our effort is not solitary. COP28 is fundamentally a collective effort, and our aims for this conference must cover multiple lines of action, because addressing climate change requires further ambitions each year while solutions are still possible. We must make progress towards an inclusive and result oriented COP that keeps the 1.5C target within reach and significantly scales up investment and the coping capacity of vulnerable communities. The struggle to address climate change offers opportunities to alleviate crises such as food, water, and security, as well as global health challenges. In recent years, we have learned just how vulnerable supply chain systems are, particularly in areas frequented by climate disasters.

Addressing food, water and security is of paramount importance, and in many ways, the base for which to build on. In recognition of the significant impact climate change has on global health issues, this year, COP28 will host the first ever health day and climate health ministerial which will introduce official high level health initiatives, emphasizing the establishment of robust and inclusive healthcare systems that can withstand the challenges being faced.

Fortunately, we are more equipped than ever to meet these challenges and seize these opportunities, both technologically and institutionally. The rapid spread of AI has only just begun to be understood, and AI is only growing more capable. Yet, technology can only be developed and realized by an educated workforce. The UAE is naturally focused on building a knowledge based economy that creates a diverse and inclusive workforce, with special attention on investing in youth and women, who we believe will be crucial towards creating the necessary solutions.

Additionally, at the institutional level, we have further developed both new and existing institutions in order to assist us. In the UAE, we also believe very strongly in the importance and role of international organizations, as they reflect our deeply held belief in the virtue and necessity of cooperation based on shared values to advance cooperation and build up regional and international integration. Regional organizations, new and old, serve an important purpose in helping tackle our pressing issues. Organizations like the African Union and the League of Arab States play a crucial role in their understanding of their respective contexts, the problems they face, and the best solutions for tomorrow. Furthermore, they serve a complimentary role to additional international institutions that still fulfil a vital role in cooperation.

Despite the changing global order, the UN remains the key institution for international cooperation. At this difficult geopolitical time in our history, polarization is growing within the UN security council, making consensus harder and harder to reach. We have witnessed this first hand during our tenure at the security council these past two years as we have worked to overcome this issue, to reform and renew as needed for the UN. Still, there remains no viable alternative to the UN for achieving cooperation through our shared values. It is these values, ultimately, that define our shared humanity. They are the reasons we recognize the need to combat climate change and to resist falling prey to baser instincts. Tolerance and co existence are our greatest legacy. Helping each other is in our very nature. It is with keeping these ideas in mind that we inaugurate this year's World Policy Conference. We do hope that this year, we can spark the types of discussions and generate the ideas that will stick with all of the attendees and speakers, and that they take what they learned with them into their lives and work, and from there, towards meaningful change.

My sincere best wishes to you all towards a very successful and fruitful conference. Thank you, and God bless you all.