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Our second speaker is Abdulrahman Al Neyadi, who is Director of Policy Planning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the UAE. He will be talking about the link between economic prosperity and security in the region, how to increase economic cooperation in the Middle East, which given the leadership role of the UAE, we are of course all interested to hear.

Abdulrahman Al Neyadi

Thank you very much and thank you for the opportunity to take part in this very important workshop. It is difficult to really discuss the region without shedding light on what is happening in Gaza. I will take less than 15 minutes but in my remarks, I will basically put a wide lens on what is happening in our region and where we can be constructive.

The region has been through one crisis after another for a long time, and with yet another crisis of this magnitude, our attention has been diverted away from all our aspirations for our region while we seek a humanitarian ceasefire and unhindered access for humanitarian aid. Looking into the day after, as Dr Mona mentioned, when we know that the status quo is not sustainable. I will try to make some diagnoses and explain why we think prosperity is part of regional security.

First, the way we look in the UAE is that any regional security architect requires a strong element of economic prosperity. You may have heard Dr Anwar Gargash in the previous session mentioning the same idea and we say that because we live in a region with one of the youngest demographics in the world. Over 55 % of our region is currently under 30-years-old and there is 30% unemployment among people with university degrees. Poverty hits one in every four children in the MENA region and that is basically the statistic that is online. This takes us to the importance of addressing these socioeconomic factors if we want to achieve sustainable peace and stability in the region. The socioeconomic factors that led to the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 have not yet been addressed. The socioeconomic factors through multiple crises and the ramifications of all the crises have been multiplied by Covid, Ukraine, and now by the Gaza War and that has left us with the reality that any path towards peace and stability must address them by trying to achieve economic prosperity.

What do we need to do that? There are three elements to pursue that objective from our perspective. First, the regional countries need to move from a geopolitical approach to a geoeconomic one and engage with a mindset of creating the economic denominators we need in our region. That obviously needs to move from what we have tried to do before, what we



see right now in Gaza, from de-escalation in the region, to cooperation. That move requires fundamental confidence building measures that many regional security initiatives neglected in the past. These confidence-building measures are very important in the goal of moving from a fragile de-escalation to reach a sustainable cooperation in the region.

Second, it is vital to address extremism in all its manifestation because we realize that it leads to terrorism and violence. Extremism also has a hazardous impact on social development, so even if it is not an extremism that passes the threshold of violence, it still has an impact that jeopardizes social development, and it needs to be addressed. However, countering extremist messaging is not enough. We need a longer term vision of enhancing education, educational systems, encouraging and building resilience in society by educating our youth in critical thinking. It is also very important to work on empowering women and youth and if I want to mention one of our most important achievements in the UAE in the last 50 years, the empowerment of women would be there as a very clear achievement because empowered women create a healthy society and prevent extremism. This is how we look at it as one of the most effective preventive measures against extremism.

Third is to provide an alternative narrative that not only counters extremist messages. The alternative requires the opportunities for our youth I mentioned, which also requires overall prosperity. These alternatives are co-existence, tolerance, freedom of religious practices, and building bridges and people-to-people engagement, which are all very important to create an alternative narrative in the region.

Everything I have mentioned could happen but it also requires strong institutions. The region requires strong institutions on national and regional level and they should be the way forward to enhance quality of life for our people because that is the sustainable approach.

I will stop here and I can take your questions later. I have tried to be brief in my diagnosis and to show you the perspective of the UAE on the region. It is very difficult at the moment to talk about an optimistic vision of the future but I have tried to give you a wider view of the region in summary.

Abdulrahman A. Al Hamidy

Thank you, very much. It always comes back to the basic issues which are full of sense, education that will prepare youth for the labor market, which is very important. Empowering people and women as a preventive measure to counter extremism and to provide alternatives. It is not enough to say you are against extremism, but what is the alternative. Tolerance and stronger institutions at both national and regional level. There will be a lot of questions so please write them down and you will have a chance to ask them.