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DURING THE ANNUAL GLOBAL LEADERSHIP FORUM
ON
LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS**

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Excellences,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here today to speak during the Annual Global Leadership Forum on Leadership in the context of multilateral negotiations.

Let me start by stating that there are various definitions of leadership that have been put forward by various scholars. I can't agree any further with each one of them. But for the purposes of this session, I would like to look at leadership simply **as those actions that motivate and inspire people to engage in the process of in order to achieve a desired vision.** This should inspire **visionary thinking** that brings about **change** instead of managing a process that maintains or steadily improves current performance.

As we focus on leadership in the context of multilateral negotiations, it is important to answer the following pertinent concerns in the process. We should start by identifying **who** are the main players, for **what purpose** are they engaged in the process, **where** and **when** the process is taking place, role of leadership and **how** it is carried out and **what** are the stakes and interests and finally, the **messages** and **observations** from the leadership in the whole process.

After setting those parameters, allow me to state that unlike unilateral and bilateral negotiations where a country decides on what to do or make decisions between two nations, multilateral negotiations are much more complex and challenging. The players in this case are various states. They could be representing various other agencies such as sub-government agencies, UN organizations, civil society

organizations, non-governmental organizations, academia, the private sector among other agencies. The list of agencies represented can just but add to the complexity of the negotiations making it difficult to reach a consensus. Each party may have to dedicate to some degree in order to make the best outcome for all.

For what purpose do the negotiations take place? In most cases, negotiations take place where states act to advance their interests and a collective idealism. States orient their actions around larger principles of human rights and common good.

More often than not, some want multilateral negotiations to work because they see it as the only way to negotiate complex global challenges with chances of achieving the fairest outcomes. Others focus on multilateral advocacy to gain traction on specific issues, especially where progress might be slower at the national levels.

Where and when does this take place? Many of the multilateral negotiations do take place within the UN, which has produced commitments to sustainable development. This can also take place in any other designated or mutually agreed place and a time that is agreeable to the various parties involved in the process.

What role does leadership play and how does it come into the process? Leadership in this context requires looking at the larger issues with a strategic vision. Some issues might have been deliberated already with an open mind but only require deeper thoughts. Leadership has to understand the context in which the multilateral negotiating system operates.

Cases where few powerful countries and political elites usually tend to dominate the multilateral debates are common. Multilateral negotiations can be characterized by multi stakeholder participation exercises that mainly serve as a political cover for powerful interests determined to drive forward their own agenda. This allows little scope for the meaningful inclusion of alternative views and information in actual decisions or their implementation

Governments of wealthier countries have a louder voice as do the international financial institutions, civil society groups from developed countries and activists from urban areas and socio economically privileged communities.

At this point, leadership is compelled to pose some questions to interrogate the process going forward such as; How can minority voices be better heard in the process of reaching international consensus? For instance, is there a tendency for those with less capacity to attain sustainable development to be held more accountable for achieving them?

As we reflect on the above questions, it is imperative for the leadership to demonstrate that multilateral negotiations should aim to moderate power and interests. It should balance idealism and realism in the interests of achieving common objectives such as sustainable development. It should be premised on fairness in decision making where everyone agrees to consistently abide by common rules and values.

Weak partners should not be tempted to imagine that powerful states use multilateral negotiations as primarily for securing short term national interests in a

competitive world. So that less powerful states do not see the multilateral arena as full of contradictions and double standards.

What are the stakes and interests in the process? To address this questions, it should be noted that most of the actions from the multilateral negotiations are usually the responsibility of governments and policy makers. All the multilateral stakeholders including the civil society, can use the recommendations to campaign for a new order where the promises of justice, equity and sustainable development can finally be fulfilled.

The more powerful have made themselves less accountable and have reduced the definition of accountability to fit their interests. It is even more about how money is spent without looking at the impact of the outcomes. However, multilateral negotiations can bring together a wealth of different perspectives and capabilities needed to achieve various objectives. They can also counteract forces that stand in the way. Many stakeholders offer valuable resources and expertise as well as unique capacities for broad political mobilization and accountability in the implementation of the agreed decisions.

Let me conclude by drawing your attention to the following messages and observations that leadership in this context can pronounce; competing needs of global significance must be fairly and equitably moderated through a multilateral negotiating system. There should be recognition that there are diverse ways of realizing the same objectives and that individual interests will always be there. They only need to be aligned with collective imperatives.

In multilateral negotiation process there tend to emerge new alliances forged around common human rights and sustainable development priorities rather than more conventional alignments related to region or economic size. States, particularly those that otherwise would have little voice, can operate from a stronger collective bargaining position.

Decision making is better served through involving a more limited number of participants. But this requires all categories of countries to be equally represented. Global economic governance for example, would include not only the most powerful countries, but also representatives from the least developed countries and smaller middle income countries.

With the development of modern technologies people in general are involved in patterns of multilateral communication that are not vertical and not within an institutional hierarchy. Communication exerts a profound influence on societies, economies and politics. In the era of globalization everyone is affected by decisions made or not made in the multilateral forums.

To strengthen national priorities in the global arena, advocacy for quality national representation by both developed and developing countries is key. This can be from the government or experts from other sectors, subnational officials and other stakeholders. They should be fully equipped to make meaningful contributions to achieving the desired objectives out of the negotiation process.

Thank You