Remarks on the occasion of UN 72 anniversary

Your Excellency, Dr. Araghchi, Deputy Foreign Minister,

Distinguished Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Our partners from across Iran in development and humanitarian work,

Friends of the United Nations,

Colleagues in the United Nations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to join my colleague Ms. Neda Mobara in welcoming you all here – very warmly – to our special UN Day celebration.

This is the fifth UN Day that I have had the privilege of celebrating here in Iran with our friends and partners. And I am always delighted to see how many of you have made the effort to come to share our special day with us.

It will be my pleasure to do two main things today.

The first is to share with you – as I always do – the reflections of our Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres on UN Day which – though officially held on 24 October – we have decided, together with our partners in MFA, to celebrate today.

Here is his message for this year.

[UN SG’s MESSAGE FOR UN DAY 2017]

And now, to my second task this morning.

Which is – with your permission – to spend a few minutes reflecting on the work of the UN family here in Iran.

Reversing the natural order, I will first focus on the present and future.

And then I will share a few thoughts on the past.
Regarding the present and future, as you may know, the UN has been tasked – by all its Member States – to assist the Governments of the world – to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

THE FUTURE – WHAT IS, AND WILL BE, THE UN’S ROLE IN SUPPORTING IRAN’S DEVELOPMENT?

Here in Iran, in order to support this objective, the UN’s top priority – in the area of development – is to support the Government to successfully implement the National Development Plan which has been approved by the Majlis and is already well-underway through thousands of different actions all across this broad and dynamic land.

We believe that if the National Development Plan is effectively implemented, this will inevitably translate into:

- Eradicating poverty,
- Improving public health,
- Fighting inequality,
- Building an inclusive and resilient society, and
- Helping Iran to contribute to protecting our planet’s environment and thus the well-being of future generations – both within Iran and abroad.

And so, in this way, Iran will make its own contribution to attaining the SDGs.

The framework through which our UN development work operates is our – jointly agreed – UN Development Assistance Framework – or UNDAF.

Our UNDAF for the current period 2017-2021 was signed into life, in the presence of Dr. Araghchi.

It is has already recorded almost one full year of work.

And, looking ahead, for the 5-year period between 2017 and 2021, we will focus – as agreed with the national authorities – on four pillars. These are:

1. The Environment
2. Health
3. A Resilient Economy, and
4. Drug Control
But UN Day also allows us an opportunity to thank our partners – many of whom are here in this room today – the Government, our development partners, our civil society and private sector partners, and of course our friends in the media – for the close and enduring collaboration we enjoy.

This partnership extends beyond the realm of development work and also embraces the UN’s humanitarian work in Iran.

And I would like to recognize the work of our partners who help us to render support to the many refugees who have sought protection within the borders of the Islamic Republic of Iran – and provide them with health, education, livelihood – and the hope of a better future.

THE PAST

So, the future of our partnership looks solid.

It looks effective.

In the year 2017 – we started our new UNDAF.

But, while we look to the future, let us also seek to recognize the accomplishments of the past and learn the important lessons they offer.

In a sense, therefore, before we turn the page, let us read it first.

So it now gives me great pleasure to share with you a tribute to the many development collaborations we forged – during the years 2012-2016.

This morning I would like you to join me in a visual tour of all our development work during that 5-year period.

Following this, I would then like to invite my distinguished colleague – and my friend – Dr. Abbas Araghchi, to help us launch the UN’s End-of-Cycle UNDAF report covering this period of time.

I would then like to ask you to allow me to conclude with a few remarks of my own.

Gentlemen, please play the film.

[THE 3-MINUTE FILM]

OUR TEAM

So, I hope you now have a better sense of both what the UN in Iran has done.
And what the UN in Iran will continue to do in support of our Member State.

Now please let me say a few words about the wonderful team which makes all of this happen.

I am speaking of the over-400 staff and personnel of the UN in Iran. These colleagues work – day in and day out – to help contribute to a situation where Iranians live safer, healthier, and more empowered lives.

Many of these colleagues are here with us in the hall this morning.

These hard-working women and men – 90 per cent of whom are Iranians – joined the United Nations with a vision to make the world a better place.

And they are living this dream.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would ask that before you leave our event today, please take a little time to engage with our UN team members in conversation.

Ask us about what we do – about our thoughts and dreams. We will have plenty tell you.

To my UN colleagues, I say this.

Thank you – most sincerely – for your dedication, and your commitment, to our noble goals of:

- peace,
- justice,
- human rights and
- development

As I have done every year since coming to Iran, I would also like to extend – through you – to your family members and loved ones – my sincerest appreciation.

Please thank them:

- For understanding the long hours of work which you put in.

And please thank them:
For forgiving us the family occasions we miss through our dedication to making our operations successful.

Our families are also very much part of the extended UN family in Iran.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please join me now in giving a round of applause to our UN colleagues – and their family members – here in Iran.

A REFLECTION ON PARTING

And now, I would like to end on a personal note.

I started my remarks this morning by saying that this is the fifth time I have had the privilege to preside – on the UN side – over this august gathering of partners, friends and well-wishers of the UN.

Sadly, this year will also be my last.

In a few short weeks, my full 5-year term as UN Resident Coordinator and head of UNDP, having started in mid-February 2013, will come to an end.

These coming weeks will permit me to make preparations for the inevitable transition for a successor to take my place.

So, it is perhaps a little early for goodbyes.

But this day – UN Day – fills my heart with pride at seeing so many of you who have come to share our special day with us.

As so many of you have faithfully done in years past.

And, with you all present, I would like to thank you – with all my heart – for your support.

More than this, I would like you to know that serving the UN in the Islamic Republic of Iran has – to date – been the richest professional experience of my life.

It will certainly be difficult to exceed this experience.

But I will try.

My future with the UN is likely to involve an effort to place all that I have learnt – over 3 decades – and across all continents of this planet – at the disposal of my organization to secure a goal towards which I have long aspired.
• Contributing to the UN’s effort to help protect our fragile, endangered planet.

But, wherever I go, Iran – Persia – will always stay with me.

Please allow me to share with you but a handful of the vivid, intoxicating images which will forever stay with me.

• The cool of the evening in the desert town of Kashan, with the sound of the azan rising as the sun sets.

• The reassuring sight of the powerful, jagged twin rows of sandstone desert mountains guarding me on either side as I mark my progress home on the road from Kerman.

• The seductive sound of the sitar, one warm evening, mingling with the breeze as we listen to Hafez with the wind blowing playfully in the curtains.

• Becoming respectfully lost in the still, Friday-morning silence at Behesht-e Zahra as mothers and daughters move about, lamenting the death of men – my age – who were lost, a generation-and-a-half earlier, in an imposed conflict which came to define this nation.

• Listening to the pleas for help from those who dwell, in peril, from a lack of water – in both Urmia and the Hamouns – and later, with the support of many others, trying to find solutions for their plight.

• Watching the dawn of another day slowly bring its torrid energy down upon the ancient city of Shiraz, only to see the inhabitants absorb and then adapt this energy to their own civilized pace for living.
Contemplating, at the foot of the Nakhsh-e Rostam – one of my favourite places in all of Iran – the far-off days when those who ruled in Persepolis commanded the affairs of vast swathes across the known world.

Reflecting upon what the first of these Achaemenid rulers – your great leader Kourosh – has given to the world in terms of code to live by. A code which was just, civilized and tolerant. An inspiration for others to try to follow.

Getting to know friends at the Tehran Peace Museum who opened their warm hearts to my wife and me. These men and women let us see both the despair of daily life for chemical weapons survivors, and the exalting ability of these very same individuals to smile and tolerate the shallow preoccupations and complaints of we who will never experience a fraction of their grief.

And, finally, reflecting, with Khanume Elizabeth, the lady who has accompanied me on a sojourn of 35 years, on the meaning of it all, as we enjoyed countless orange sunsets reflect off the silent and majestic Alborz Mountains – across five deep winters – from our home in Tehran.

So, friends, I end these reflections – and hope you will indulge me – as I recite a few words – in my poor Farsi – which will stay with me whenever I think of the five years Elizabeth and I have spent as welcomed guests in your rich, enchanting land.

My friends, thank you all – so much – for coming, this morning, to support us.

Sepass gozarim.