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Good morning, all protocols observed, excellencies.

Our world is leaderless. Multilateral institutions are weakened, sidelined by super powers. Those who claim entitlement to a place of honour in the UN Security Council, G7 and G20 have not shown the required wisdom and the leadership to forge regional and global partnership for action to resolve the many man-made catastrophes plaguing entire communities and nations across the globe.

Global challenges are not met with adequate preventative soft power strategies and action. Hard power tools available to the mightily rich of the world are not lawfully applied because the powers that could make a difference between war and peace are too busy squandering resources in narrow, selfish rivalries, each bent on regional influence and supremacy.

According to Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi, every year in the last two decades, the annual wealth of the world has increased by \$30 trillion and yet hundreds of millions of our fellow human beings in the global south do not have access to clean water, nature's treasure that is fast becoming a scarcity in cities and countries across the world.

Shockingly, there is never enough money for clean water and sanitation, for sustainable agriculture, food security and child and mother nutrition. There is never enough money for universal healthcare and fully equipped hospitals in most of the global south.

Even in the face of tens of millions of fellow human beings thrown back into the agony of poverty, most creditor countries and commercial banks worldwide refuse to write off the debt of the now critically impoverished countries.

We share the same planet but we live in different global villages. Most survive in slums; a few live in *Alice in Wonderland* palatial homes; but we are all vulnerable as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have shown.

If the global south is not supported in meaningful ways to recover their livelihoods, no walls will be thick enough and high enough to prevent millions of destitute and desperate from continuing to flock to the privileged north.

In the aftermath of the 2008 to 2009 subprime financial crisis, the instinct of reaction of the rich, industrialised countries was to impose extreme austerity measures on their own workers and middle class, particularly Greece and Portugal but the same time channel hundreds of billions of dollars to rescue exposed European banks. Likewise, billions of dollars continue to pour into Ukraine war and in support of the millions of Ukrainian refugees in Europe.

However, there has not been similar mobilisation of compassion to assist developing countries shackled by external debt, tragic consequence of COVID pandemic, commodity markets crash, extreme rise in shipping cost, inflation, etc.

Official development assistance (ODA), which has been dramatically reduced following the 2008 financial crisis, has not returned to the very modest ODA pre-crisis figures. If the global community of the rich across the globe wishes to see a fair and a peaceful world, a world without extreme poverty and conflict, every Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country should allocate 1.0% of its national GDP towards ODA but to a drastically reformed ODA that has spent real money in the recipient countries with less legal and bureaucratic entanglements, less demands and intrusions, less middle men involved in the chain of the aid disbursement.

If the rich north wishes to regain the trust of the global south, there has to be wiser and more honest and determined strategy to support the hundreds of millions who, for decades, humble queue up for Western aid. Much of it was spent not in the supposedly recipient needing country but actually spent on endless studies, mission, international experts, etc.

Many in the global south should bear also responsibility for our predicament for not investing in our own people, in quality education, in health services, agriculture, food security, preservation of forest and water sources. And billionaires of the global south should come together to support a global south fund for education and health, to support projects like bringing clean water to every community, sustainable agriculture, food security, youth employment and eradication of child stunt and malnutrition.

The global south cannot go on pointing fingers at the rich north, a north whose own fortunes are less bright today with an aging population, less young workforce and less fighting men and women for their own defences. The billionaires and trillionaires of the south and the north should do their part to share their mammoth fortunes with the less fortunate of our common humanity by investing in education and jobs for the youth of the south, to rescue Asia and Africa from environmental depredation and the climate crisis.

This is all part of the new regional and global security challenges, too convenient and unpersuasive to look at China with tunnel vision as a regional and global threat. China has spread globally. It is now a global power. Its interest, the wellbeing of its people, its security are intertwined with those of the rest of the world. I would think that China has every interest not to kill the cow that's supplying the milk.

If my friends in the West and Europe wish to understand why so many countries around the world are allegedly shifting their priorities to China, let me share with you a conversation I had with an impoverished Somali diplomat in the Palais des Nations in Geneva sometime in the early '90s.

The mighty USSR had imploded. Somalia had imploded earlier when in 1977, one of the Soviet Union most trusted ally, the dictator Siad Barre invaded Ethiopia's Ogaden province. The end of Somalia began then in the desert of Ogaden and with it, the loss of the Soviet Union, its most important footprint in the Horn of Africa, Berbera naval base.

The junior diplomat and I had become friends and often over a *café au lait* in the Serpentine, an attractive coffee lounge in the Palais des Nations. We shared stories of our misfortunes. He said in resigned fatality, I quote, 'In the past when the Europeans and Americans lectured us on human rights and refused to help, we just turned to Moscow. Now, we are alone; nowhere to go; no one is helping us.'

It was believed and, actually, it was feared in some quarters that the collapse of the Soviet Union would have unpredictable contagious impact on China. Well, China survived it all. Fast forward to 2023, China is a true global power, a magnet for disillusion with the West.

I haven't seen my Somali friend in a long time. But nowadays, he probably would say, I quote, 'We are no longer alone. Now, we go to China', end of quote.

Excellencies, while Asia continues to lead the world in growth and prosperity, dark clouds hang over our region – ranging from extreme poverty, inequality exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic, man-made climate change, the war initiated by Russia against its neighbour Ukraine, food chain/international trade disruption, commodity prices, external debt, nuclear proliferation, North Korea, South China Sea, Taiwan.

We can continue to entertain the illusion that Democratic People's Republic of Korea may give up its nuclear weapon ambitions. But the DPRK is already a nuclear power and I don't see how a totalitarian nuclear power would willingly dismantle its arsenal.

Having said that, I submit that to help keep the peace in the Korean Peninsula, China and US must reengage at summit level, agree that strategic competition is inevitable, normal, to be expected even between friends. We need a US–China partnership for peace in the Korean Peninsula and in the wider region. This should outweigh differences in other areas of competition and rivalry between the two super powers, to help keep the peace in the region.

The three northeast Asian powers – China, Japan, Republic of Korea – should continue their mutually beneficial exchanges, expand trade and investment, expand people-to-people context and find ways to overcome the bitter legacies of the past.

The militarisation and building of artificial islands for military purpose in South China Sea is inconsistent with international law, in relation to exclusive economic zone, freedom of navigation. It creates mistrust, mutual suspicion; it escalates tension and leads to confrontation.

South China Sea should be declared a zone of peace and cooperation, free of permanent military facilities and all must observe the provisions of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on exclusive economic zones.

Outside powers should refrain from making statements and/or taking actions in regards to Taiwan that are considered provocative and contrary to the clearly established reality of One China policy. We earnestly hope that the US and China manage their economic trade, scientific, technological and influence-seeking competition with serenity and wisdom so as not to weaken themselves as credible deterrents and guarantors of peace and stability in Asia and beyond.

Excellencies, in the midst of global turmoil, I'm pleased to say my country, Timor-Leste, is a twinkling light of peace and fraternity. On 21st May, 80% of our voters went to the poles to cast their vote for the party and leaders of their choice, among 17 political parties competing in 21st May parliamentary elections. The election was hailed by national and international observers as very peaceful, orderly, free and transparent.

The Economist magazine democracy index rate Timor-Leste as the most democratic country in Southeast Asia and Freedom House classify it as free. World Press Freedom index placed Timor-Leste in tenth position globally.

We are an island of peace, tranquillity, tolerance and inclusion. Political violence, ethnic- and religion-based tension and exclusion are absent from our daily life. Our 98% practicing Catholics live side-by-side in harmony and fraternity with our brothers and sisters of the other two recognised religions in our country – Protestants and Muslims – who account for 2% of our population.

Once ballots were in, thousands of citizens across the crowded open-air buildings, despite the heat, watched them being counted. Many of us from conflict countries know too well that ending conflict, restoring peace, reconciling divided communities, uniting the nation and governing peacefully is never easy.

Some believe in the security approach, the use of force to deter and quell dissent and conflict. From day one of independence, we opted for dialogue to resolve disputes through patient listening, humility, empathy, forgiveness.

For the victimised families and communities with deep scars in their body and heart, the words reconciliation and forgiveness can be offensive. However, the strength and motivation to reconcile with former enemies and forgive and have to be found within ourselves and only wise and inspirational leaders can help heal the wounds of the soul, inspire and help communities to free themselves from the shackles of conflict of anger.

We have an exemplary relationship with all our neighbours, whatever the nature of past relationships, good and bad. Membership in ASEAN is a strategic goal for us. ASEAN membership, regional economic integration, peace and inclusive prosperity is not only a foreign policy priority, it is very much a pillar of our national life and agenda.

Timor-Leste now is an observer state with the right to participate in all ASEAN meetings, including the summit. ASEAN leaders approved the roadmap for Timor-Leste's formal accession as the 11th ASEAN member state. Formal admission as the 11th member state may occur as we implement a key milestone.

Timor-Leste is firmly committed to undertake institutional, policy and regulatory reforms, enhance human resources development, invest in strategic infrastructure that creates new opportunities for our economy and addresses common regional challenges in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. This would ensure that our membership benefits not only our country but the region as a whole.

I thank you. God bless you all.