Message from the secretary Alicia Bárcena Ibarra
"Seventh Intersessional Meeting for dialogue and cooperation on Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"
Februrary 11, 2025

Distinguished excellencies,

Dear delegates,

Esteemed colleagues,

It is a great honor to bring to you the warm and fraternal greetings of President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, who is the first woman and environmental scientist to lead Mexico—a milestone in our nation's history.

I also want to express my deepest gratitude to my dear friend, Volker Türk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for his kind invitation to deliver these opening remarks at the Seventh Inter-sessional Meeting. Your leadership and commitment to human rights continue to inspire us all.

With just five years remaining, we stand at a critical crossroads. As highlighted recently in Davos, the *Global Risks Report 2025* paints a troubling picture—one that threatens our stability, progress, and all the foundations of global

cooperation and multilateralism. The urgency to act has never been greater.

It is clear: we are not merely witnessing an era of change—we are living through a change of era. This pivotal moment compels us to rethink the very certainties that, until recently, defined the world as we knew it.

Several months ago a Colombian colleague said that thinking outside the box is not longer enough. We must throw away the box and think of an entirely new one.

Systemic human rights violations, climate change-induced natural disasters, irregular migration, and the trafficking of people, arms, and drugs are so challenging and are shaking the very foundations of human civilization.

There is no alternative—if we truly want to leave no one behind, we must act together. And the time to act is now.

The United Nations' proposed path is already driving meaningful progress toward sustainable development.

But, while challenges remain, we see encouraging trends and even greater opportunities to accelerate the transformation of our world. Our agenda for change is on track—and this transition is irreversible. No individual or

nation, no matter how powerful, can turn back the tide of progress.

Across different regions around the world, merchants of fear exploit these challenges to win elections—fueling xenophobia, racism, and discrimination at the expense of human rights.

Yet, as an international community, I am convinced that we can rise above this.

But we need to act boldly. We have to transform crisis into opportunity and build a future defined by justice not only by fear.

The path forward is not unilateralism, but cooperation.

Mexico has been a strong advocate for multilateralism.

We need to regain confidence in it and its institutions, in the agreement, in the conviction that, despite our diversity, we are part of the same community, planet, and with the same destiny.

Our international action is losing legitimacy when our resolutions don´t translate into concrete benefits for people, for the planet, for prosperity.

Global challenges require global solutions. Therefore, we truly regret the recent withdrawal of support by the United States for the UN Human Rights Council and other multilateral institutions. This is not the way forward.

In September 2024, I stood witness at the UN headquarters in New York as we collectively approved the *Pact for the Future*. The message from Secretary-General António Guterres was clear and urgent: we cannot wait for perfect conditions to act. The time for bold, decisive actions is now.

The transformation of global governance must be guided by three pillars: sustainable development, peace, and human rights.

As we witnessed the senseless loss of thousands of innocent lives in Gaza, Ukraine, and beyond, we must hold on to hope in the enduring strength of humanity.

I fully agree with my friend Volker Türk: the suffering of the people in these territories has been unbearable. But there is no magic wand—no single solution—to solve these conflicts. It's clear: deportation or forcible transfer of persons from occupied territory is strictly prohibited under international law. We cannot allow that from happening.

Instead of resigning ourselves to division and despair, we must usher in a new era—one where peace and security are built on the foundations of dignity, equality, and unwavering respect for human rights.

As we look ahead to the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, we stand before a golden opportunity.

Now is the time to adopt concrete measures to really reform the international financial architecture—ensuring that it responds to the needs and aspirations of all of our societies while safeguarding the opportunities of future generations.

In this context, allow me to address two key issues of this session:

First of all, the urgent need to transform the global debt landscape that we are facing today through a human rights-based approach. The mounting global debt burden is disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable nations, the smaller nations, forcing them to divert critical resources from health, education, infrastructure, and climate action, from development, to meet unsustainable debt repayments.

The World Bank's latest *International Debt Report* reveals a stark reality: by the end of 2023, the total external debt of low- and middle-income countries reached a record $8.8 trillion dollars—8% increase since 2020.

For some developing nations, debt swaps for climate and nature conservation offer a viable path. For others, reallocating IMF Special Drawing Rights could provide temporary relief. Yet, many of these measures will not suffice.

This is why we need to reform the global financial system.

We therefore call on international actors to act responsibly designing a debt system that fosters development, rather than stifling the prosperity of entire societies.

Secondly, we must urgently develop indicators that have to go beyond the Gross Domestic Product, beyond GDP, and fully integrate environmental action, gender equality, and intergenerational justice.

For too long, economic success has been measured only by growth. While GDP has been a useful tool, nobody is against it, is very incomplete. Because it fails to capture governance challenges that weaken democracy ignores the impact of our economic activities on the environment.

So, to put this in perspective: according to a recent *National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER)* report, the climate crisis is costing the world 12% of GDP for every 1°C that we are rising. This is an economic and moral imperative we can no longer afford to overlook.

The world is rapidly evolving and our metrics must evolve with it. In all our efforts, human rights must be the foundation of global economic policy. Only by measuring what truly matters we can build an economy that serves both people and the planet.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is our roadmap, but reaching its goals demands collective action.

Diplomacy must prevail.

Mexico's long-standing diplomatic tradition—rooted in respect and the self-determination of nations—is for us a crucial lesson: no matter how powerful or inflexible our partners may be, we must always place our trust in dialogue and the power of reason.

Dear friends,

We cannot afford to remain indifferent or to accept the status quo. We have been told that change is impossible—that

the 'sensible' choice is to surrender to the will of those who always prevail.

I refuse to accept that. Instead, I want to recall the words of Bertolt Brecht:

'Don't accept the usual as a matter of course, because in times of bloody disorder, of organized confusion, of conscious arbitrariness, of dehumanized humanity, nothing must seem impossible to change.'

So, through this respectful dialogue, the protection of human rights, solidarity, and collaboration, we have to break away from the path of despair and chart a course toward a just and sustainable future.

Thank you very much.