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UN WILL NEED TO WORK CLOSELY WITH CIVIL SOCIETY, SECRETARY-GENERAL TELLS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY HEARINGS WITH NGOS, PRIVATE SECTOR

Following is the text of remarks, as delivered, by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the General Assembly hearings with civil society and the private sector, on 24 June:

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I regret I could not be with you yesterday at the opening, and, of course, this makes it even more important that I can join you today. I've just come in from Europe.

I know that after some technical glitches at the start, you have had two days of very fruitful discussions.

As we have heard from representatives of civil society, you have raised a wide range of issues, ranging from gender, human rights and conflict prevention to aid, trade, debt and the environment.

You have expressed your support for the proposed Human Rights Council, and the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission. You have spelt out the case for developed countries to devote 0.7 per cent of their income to aid. You have spoken about the need to integrate environmental issues into strategies for the future.

You have argued for greater emphasis on gender. All of us should agree 100 per cent. Gender issues are not for women alone. They're for all of us. Some of you have recounted personal experiences and traumas to stress the need for action to assist those seeking freedom from fear.

You have asked for stronger language on these and many other issues in the draft outcome for the World Summit.

Overall, listening to you this afternoon, and what has been going on for the last two days, your message is loud and clear: to build a more prosperous, just and peaceful world, we need Member States to take bold actions here in September.

I am delighted that Member States have attended these hearings in large numbers and have heard that message.

As the Deputy Secretary-General noted at the opening yesterday, these hearings should represent a significant new step in the way the United Nations relates to civil society.

And the speakers have indicated they wanted this to continue, and Member States have also heard that. I hope the format will be used again as part of the General Assembly's efforts to open up and interact much more with non-State actors. We now have good experience to build on.

That is all the more crucial as we look ahead from September.

Whether we are talking about the fight against poverty and HIV/AIDS, or the responsibility to protect, or the prevention of armed conflict, or any of the other challenges on our agenda -- the UN will need to work in close partnership with civil society to implement what is decided this year. Together, we can make poverty history.

Finally, let me thank the President of the General Assembly for his leadership, as well as the Task Force which assisted him. And let me thank all the Member States who attended.

Above all, let me thank the participants from civil society and the private sector for coming to the United Nations and making these two days a success. We are all determined to make poverty history.

I hope you will keep making your voices heard in the lead-up to the World Summit in September, and afterwards, to hold Governments and us responsible to our obligations and promises. I am grateful to every one of you for your commitment.

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