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REMARKS AT THE OPENING OF "A DAY IN THE WORLD" EXHIBITION

New York, 18 October 2013

Ambassador Grunditz,
Director Söder,
Chairman Ståhel,
Mr. Wikström,
Dear guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here for the opening of the “A Day in the World” exhibition.

I feel especially privileged to welcome this exhibition to New York, since I was fortunate to serve on Aday.org’s Global Advisory Council for three years, together with Martti Ahtisaari, Desmond Tutu, Mary Robinson and others. Jesper Wikström was the driving spirit, the irrepresive driving force in this project.

More than 60,000 people in 190 countries participated, and 100,000 pictures were submitted – you can see them all on the Internet.

Yesterday, a major exhibition featuring hundreds of these photos opened in Sarajevo. Today, we host a selection here on Dag Hammarskjold Plaza.

These ordinary images tell an extraordinary story.

It is not just the story of one day told from many thousands viewpoints.

It is the story of our common humanity.

People sleeping, working and playing video games or sports.

Holding their babies, grooming their children, feeding their families.

Feeling boredom, hunger, pain and joy.

Crowding together on public transportation.

This project vividly brings to life a truth we all instinctively understand– the truth of our fundamental equality.

These images remind me of Article One of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

An international jury selected a thousand images for a special book that I keep outside my office so that all my visitors can see it.

It shows that a woman might peek through a window in the ancient city of Alexandria, Egypt – or a man might peek through a circus tent that was just set up in Vällingby, Sweden. Their immediate horizons are different – but their long-term future is shared.

We see the glorious richness of human diversity

But we are not spared the brutality of human disregard for life.

The photos of Syrian children in war are especially shattering.

We see the beautiful faces of a young boy and girl But the photographer observes that “the childhood innocence of these two was ruined by the sounds of bombing not far away.”

It is not enough to remember our shared humanity – we must also act on our common responsibility.

A responsibility to live as one human family, embracing our magnificent diversity and rejecting hate and division, exploitation and abuse, inhumanity and war.

A responsibility to understand that those who are poor, or ill, or otherwise vulnerable are a part of us. And that by extending a helping hand to them we can build a better future for all.

Almost sixty years ago today, on October 21st, 1953, Dag Hammarskjöld observed that, “The nerve signals from a wound are felt at once through the body of mankind.”

Six decades ago, long before anyone used the word “globalization” or surfed the worldwide web, Hammarskjöld knew that we are all connected.

In a speech to the Foreign Policy Association, he concluded that the test of diplomacy is to “rally public opinion behind what is wise and necessary for the peace and progress of the world.”

My own version of this thought is that we must keep two prospectives in mind while serving in this Organization. First we must see the UN as a reflection of the world as it is –

whether we like it or not. But secondly we must never forget to work for the world as we want it to be.

This powerful exhibition, A Day in the World, reminds us that we should cherish every moment – and that we should treasure each other and our planet.

I hope it is seen far and wide.

I declare this exhibition open!

Thank you.

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