

**Speech by Mahmoud Mohieldin**

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The 2030 Agenda, United Nations Relations and Partnerships

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**President Malpass,**

**UN Deputy Secretary General Ms. Amina Mohammed**

**Dean Merza Hassan**

**Ambassador and Mme. Yasser Reda**

**H.E. Dr. Hazem Beblawy**

**Minister Hany Qadry**

**Ambassador Dina Kawar**

**Ambassador Raguie El Etreby**

**Mme. Elizabeth Cousens**

**Distinguished Members of the Board of the World Bank Group**

**Fellow Colleagues and Friends,**

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for joining us today. I am very grateful for the kind words of appreciation and acknowledgment of my work by the three distinguished speakers. But I am standing before you as a person who benefited from the excellent work and support of many people, some of them here today and many more I wish were here with us.

I am here today thanks to my parents; to the personal sacrifice of my wife, Yomna, who is here today; and to my daughter, Suehayla (Sue), my chief critic and challenger. I am here today thanks to my teachers, colleagues, and friends in Egypt and around the world.

I am here today thanks to the hard-working and extremely dedicated members of my teams, who worked with me tirelessly for many years here in Washington and in our Geneva and New York offices. Colleagues: It was an honor serving the world and contributing to the World Bank Group mission with you. Please join me in thanking them all.

In my work I relied on the highly professional, talented, and skillful staff of the World Bank, IFC, and MIGA. To them all, I am very grateful.

I would like to express my gratitude to Robert Zoellick, Jim Kim, and David Malpass, the three WBG presidents that I have had the pleasure of working with. And through them I would like to thank the senior management teams at the Bank, IFC, MIGA, and ICCID. I would like to thank the WBG board members, who have been incredibly supportive and engaged in my work over the past 10 years.

Among our partners, there are too many to name them all. But allow me to thank Ms. Amina Mohammed, who is representing the UN system today, and whose leadership and openness to collaboration have been invaluable. I also wish to convey my gratitude to the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres; former Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon; current and past members of the Chief Executives Board; and UN staff.

During the last 10 years, I worked in close partnership with many friends and colleagues at the IMF, multilateral development banks, civil society, universities, think tanks, the private sector and all of the Gs: G20, G24, G7 and G77 and China.

I learned as much as I could from the knowledge and expertise of development specialists, humanitarian workers, and first responders to crises and disasters. But chiefly, I was humbled by the steadfastness and resilience of the many brave people I met during field visits, especially in the camps and settlements of refugees and displaced people in Africa, the Middle East, and Cox's Bazar, in Bangladesh.

Today I remember my conversation on my first day at the Bank with Bob Zoellick, whom I respect and admire, for he is a very knowledgeable and exceptional statesman. "What are you going to do next?" he asked—not the typical question one gets on the first day of a new job! I told him I would be here for perhaps a couple of years and then move on. Now after almost a decade at the Bank, I have a

better answer, which I will deliver at the end of my speech (if you still remember the question and I remember the answer).

As I conclude my journey with the Bank, I want to reflect on the last frenetic decade, which brought us many great humanitarian and development challenges, including mass forced displacement, new and renewed conflicts, rising global temperatures and natural disasters, pandemics, and intensifying interrogations of the multilateral system. At the same time, the decade also presented many new opportunities to serve the planet and its people through better technology and new innovations.

**I want to talk about three areas** that I believe will summarize our joint determination to overcome challenges, the need for multilateralism, and my personal approach to our common efforts.

**The first** is our joint determination to address rising challenges. The past decade is a reminder of the words of President John F. Kennedy, who said during his 1961 address to the UN General Assembly, “Together we shall save our planet, or together we shall perish in its flames.”

More than a third of the world lived in extreme poverty 30 years ago. Thanks to our joint determination and efforts, less than 10 percent live in extreme poverty today. Nearly 90 percent of the world’s population now has access to electricity, the child mortality rate has drastically declined, and the share of people without access to basic drinking water and sanitation services has decreased remarkably.

I am proud of the role that the World Bank Group has played in all of these achievements. For example, IDA—our fund for the poorest—has provided, since 1960, more than \$390 billion for investments in 113 countries. In the most recent IDA replenishment, completed just last month, the global community committed \$82 billion to help the 76 poorest countries invest in the needs of their people, boost economic growth, and bolster resilience to climate shocks and natural disasters.

Yet the job is not done, particularly in Africa, where the majority of the world’s extremely poor live and more than half of the population lacks access to electricity. And while school enrollment has improved, it is of great concern that more than half of all children in low- and middle-income countries and 90 percent of children in poor countries suffer from learning poverty.

The last decade has also presented other new challenges and reshaped others. More than a decade after the financial crisis and the Great Recession, the world is suffering from rising inequality, and the threats of more inequality will continue in

the digital age in the absence of new paradigm to enhance equal opportunities and fair competition. A surge in violent conflict since 2010 has led to historically high levels of forced displacement and refugees. Climate change is clearly a prime cause for concern, as drought, natural disasters, and rising temperatures threaten to erode gains in the fight to end poverty and may push some communities into poverty. Pandemics pose major health, social, and economic risks. And the latest rising debt wave—the largest, fastest, and most broad-based increase in debt in developing economies since 2010—has triggered a debate about the potential consequences of elevated debt levels and the likelihood that if not properly tackled, this wave will end in crisis.

Most of the challenges we face today are global. They require a well-coordinated multilateral response in which everyone, including states and nonstate actors, civil society, and the private sector, must play a vital role.

This brings me to my **second point**: the continued need for a strong multilateral system to deal with these challenges and enhance the opportunities for achieving the sustainable development goals, including our twin goals, SDG1 and SDG10. Following a decade of service at the World Bank Group, I am more convinced than ever that no country can overcome these global challenges alone. We need a well-functioning multilateral system that can address global challenges with evidence-based solutions, including quick response, crisis prevention, and postcrisis arrangements. Throughout my time at the World Bank, I have traveled extensively, including to countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) or natural disasters. I have witnessed first-hand the value of multilateralism.

While not perfect, the global response to the Syrian refugee crisis, the violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar, the humanitarian crises in Yemen and Somalia, and the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, to name a few, saved lives and reduced suffering. The World Bank Group responded rapidly in providing critical food and service delivery to displaced people around the world and has provided income support, cash transfers, health and nutrition interventions, and assisted education and training systems in close partnership with its development partners. The value of our contribution has always been to keep such essential support within a system of development and with effective budgeting and to facilitate the transition from humanitarian to development impact.

These responses have demonstrated how the international community can be effective when working through a multilateral system that pools resources and expertise. Of course, credit goes to the World Bank Group's board, management, and staff, who have been agile and effective in scaling up support for the global

response to epidemics (I remember how quickly our board reacted to the call by Jim Kim in September 2014), natural disasters, and support in FCV countries.

History has shown us that we will always have some kind of multilateralism: multilateralism for peace and prosperity or multilateralism for war and destruction. It is a matter of global public choice.

Ladies and Gentlemen. I am happy to leave the WBG a bigger and better bank than it was in 2010—the objective of all those who worked so hard over this decade. With the capital increase, a more resourceful IDA, more partnerships with IFC and the private sector, sound and healthy balance sheets, more diversity and inclusion in our best asset (our staff), with more gender balance and a promise to do more work for women, including with women entrepreneurs, the Bank is ready to do more, especially in the digital age. More than ever, the Bank needs to be what President Wolfensohn pushed for: a knowledge bank. He was right then, and he is even more right today. The Bank contributes to global responses not only through financial resources but also through knowledge sharing, technical assistance, and the mobilization of ideas for action.

We have shown that working with countries in need today will pay off in the future. Indeed, many of today's IDA donors were IDA beneficiaries and Bank borrowers in the recent past.

**Finally**, I would like to say a few words about my personal experience at the World Bank Group. The past decade has been challenging but also inspiring and rewarding. During my service, I was exposed to many ideas, good ideas as well as bad ideas, of the kind Nobel laureate Mike Spence and his growth commission warned us of. Many ideas—interesting, confusing, practical and seemingly impossible. I have been most fascinated and profoundly interested in the idea of progress. In *Harvest of the Years*, the contemporary Egyptian philosopher Zaki Naguib Mahmoud wrote simply and very eloquently that the idea of progress is a complex one and contains many dimensions. Applying the idea of progress should imply that the present has full understanding of the past and adds something new and of a value for the future. Progress is about embracing change and unleashing the potential of evolution, free thinking, fair competition, effective partnerships, and implementation in a race against time. That's why I liked the work on the SDGs and the 2030 agenda and appreciated the work of our board, supported by our technical staff of experts, on its seminal piece "The Forward Look," which was the basis of our new shareholding agreement and subsequently the significant capital increase.

As I reflect on my time here, I have found myself to be a connector and a bridge, both among units at the WBG and between our institution and its many partners, not least those in the UN system. I first learned to be a connector as a child, when I balanced myself between the rural and urban members of my extended family, the Mohieldins of Egypt—those who lived in Cairo and other big cities and those who hailed from the village of Kafr Shukr, in the Egyptian delta. I wanted to maintain a line of sight to each and to respect my dual heritage. In my childhood, I was perceived by my fellow villagers as a city boy and by the Cairenes as a villager. It was always fun and a privilege for me to be the interpreter and the connector across different cultures, habits, manners, and customs, the one who tries to know the others better.

I continued these functions as I went to school and college, studying in England (I was the student–staff liaison officer at University of Warwick) and serving in the Egyptian government, which has not been an easy task since the time of the pharaohs. (You can doublecheck by reading the *Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt*, by Toby Wilkinson or watching my friend Dr. Zahy Hawas on YouTube or accepting my invitation for tea to tell you all about it.) Throughout these times, I served as a bridge between people who had different social and political affiliations, interests, and cultural backgrounds. I think I benefited from this experience during my time as managing director, President’s special envoy; Corporate Secretary, in my current post, I put this skill into practice.

While it has been hugely rewarding to be a bridge between the humanitarian and development actors, mobilizing these two sides, with their comparative advantages for the benefit of all those in need, has at times been confusing or frustrating for colleagues and partners on both sides. This is also true of my time as corporate secretary, when colleagues in senior management sometimes saw me as part of the board while the board dealt with me as part of the senior management team. Nevertheless, this bridge was an important one—and one that must be redesigned with each new challenge and each new relationship.

In all cases, for a connector or bridge to survive challenges, heavy traffic, and shocks and to be useful for those who depend on it, it has to be resilient, efficient, and credible. I would like to thank you all for all your trust and confidence.

I cannot end before thanking the Egyptian diplomatic service for its generous support. I appreciate the help I got from the convening power and networks of Egyptian diplomacy around the world in mobilizing support to back our common objectives over the past years, especially during Egypt’s membership on the Security Council, its Presidency of the Group of 77 and China, and the current presidency of the African Union.

Now the answer to the question of Mr. Zoellick a decade ago, and recently of many others. the American Poet Alisha Stallings wrote in “After a Greek Proverb”:

*We’re here for the time being, I answer to the query—  
Just for a couple of years, we said, a dozen years back.  
Nothing is more permanent than the temporary.*

...

*But there are boxes that you never do unpack.  
Nothing is more permanent than the temporary.*

...

*Stuff receipts in envelopes, file papers in a stack.  
Nothing is more permanent than the temporary.*

...

*We’re here for the time being, I answer to the query.*

**It has been a tremendous privilege to serve alongside you, dear colleagues and friends. Thank you very much!**