



WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT: UPHOLDING THE NORMS THAT PROTECT HUMANITY

STATEMENT DELIVERED BY SALIL SHETTY, SECRETARY GENERAL, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

When thinking of how best to use my time here today, one option I seriously considered was to observe a three minute silence to mourn the demise of international norms and humanitarian law.

These are arguably the darkest times since the formation of the United Nations. Conflict is driving displacement and wreaking devastating consequences on civilians who are literally caught in the crossfire.

I come to this Summit straight after seeing and hearing first-hand the horrific tales of displaced people in Iraq and south-east Turkey – two windows into a shameful worldwide story.

The stark truth is that from Syria to Nigeria, Afghanistan to South Sudan, Burundi to Ukraine, conflict zones have become a free-for-all. The norms put in place to protect us are treated with complete and utter disdain.

Let me single out Yemen, where 2.8 million people – women, children, families – have been displaced in a conflict that has seen brutal violence against civilians and consistent disregard of international humanitarian law by both sides, including possible war crimes.

Even hospitals have been bombed multiple times, and schools shelled and destroyed.

Just two weeks ago, Amnesty International interviewed a 13-year-old boy who picked up a submunition near a spring that local people rely on for water. He said it was like “a small ball that you play with”. But this ball was an unexploded bomblet which ripped through his abdomen.

This is the world our children are growing up in. The binding obligations of international law that are supposed to protect us all are being treated with anything from indifference to outright contempt.



Without confronting this pernicious erosion of international humanitarian law, an already terrible humanitarian situation will only get worse.

And without accountability, there will be no stopping the downward spiral.

There are accountability mechanisms in place. They must be used. States must hold even their allies to account. We cannot turn a blind eye. If we do, the consequences of violations are on all of us.

Amnesty International will continue to investigate abuses of international law wherever they happen. We will pursue accountability for perpetrators, and truth, justice and reparations for victims. We will call on all states to support Security Council action aimed at preventing or ending mass atrocities.

We will campaign to ensure states live up to their obligations to the unprecedented numbers who are displaced, and establish a global responsibility-sharing system for refugees that is up to the scale of the task. It is high time the richest countries live up to their flaunted claims of respect for human rights.

When I asked displaced families in camps near Falujjah in Iraq what they wanted from this meeting today, the women were the first to speak up. They said: “We cannot suffer this pain anymore. We have waited far too long. Please tell them to act now.”

This is happening on our watch. Succeeding generations will judge us for our success or failure in these dark times. Let us convert the warm words into action. Let us turn the tide on injustice.

Thank you.