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PARTNERS IN REFORM

THE U.S. AND THE NEW SECRETARY-GENERAL

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The new UN Secretary-General takes office at time when the United Nations is facing an array of transnational and multifaceted challenges. Growing demands and finite resources, however, mean the UN must strive to reform its operations and management practices as it works to confront these obstacles head on. As the former Prime Minister of Portugal and the head of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Secretary-General-designate Antonio Guterres has done exactly that. During his decade-long tenure at UNHCR, Mr. Guterres led the most profound structural reform process in the agency’s history i.e. UNHCR tripled its annual activities, increased its efficiency in delivery and coordination, and dramatically reduced the burden of its structural and administration costs. This occurred all while responding to the largest human displacement since the end of World War II.

Mr. Guterres, for example, **pushed for a major reduction in staff and operating expenses** to make UNHCR more nimble and reflexive. In 2006, UNHCR had 1,047 staff members in Geneva. Three years later, the number had been reduced to 700. The savings was derived from moving many staff and offices to Budapest, a far less expensive city than Geneva. The transfer led to a significant reduction in the agency’s headquarters budget. In 2006, UNHCR’s HQ budget was 13.9 percent of total expenditures – by 2008 it had been cut to approximately 9 percent.

U.S.-UN REFORM EFFORTS

These and similar efforts are the kind of common sense reforms we expect the new Secretary-General to pursue when he assumes his duties next year – a process the U.S. will play a critical role in advancing. Over the past decade, the U.S. has been firmly engaged at the UN and paid our dues in full, resulting in enactment of a number

of reforms that cut costs, enhance effectiveness, and promote transparency. For example:

The UN reduced its **2016-17 regular budget by roughly \$400 million**, compared to 2014-15. In addition, the 2016-17 budget eliminated 150 redundant staff posts and reduced supply and travel expenses by 5 percent. With strong backing by the U.S., the General Assembly also reassessed the UN's staff compensation package for the first time in 26 years, resulting in tens of millions of dollars in expected savings over the coming years.

The UN recently implemented the Global Field Support Strategy (GFSS), a five-year project (2010-2015) aimed at improving the efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and speed of administrative and logistics support to UN field missions. As a result of these efforts, the **cost per peacekeeper declined by 18 percent** between 2008 and 2015. Moreover the number of support and security staff serving on UN peacekeeping missions **declined by 3,000** over the same period, despite the fact that the number of uniformed personnel in the field has actually increased.

In the spirit of transparency, the UN now makes all internal audit reports issued by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) publicly available online. This development followed similar decisions by UNICEF, UNDP, and UNFPA. The U.S. Mission to the UN has called this commitment to transparency **"a turning point in how the UN does business."**

WHY U.S. ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

These types of priorities should be further pursued in partnership with the new Secretary-General and require concentrated engagement and participation in the UN system. Efforts to reform the UN from the "outside" – via threats to withhold dues or switch to a voluntary funding

model have been debated for years and shown to be counter-productive.

For example, the 2005 congressionally mandated Newt Gingrich-George Mitchell report on UN Reform advised against switching from the current system, where some of our UN payments are assessed and some are voluntary, to an entirely voluntary funding scheme. **The bipartisan commission made clear that a completely voluntary funding scheme would be counter to U.S interests as these schemes are often slow and would likely cause under-funding for American priorities.** This is one reason why the George W. Bush Administration issued a Statement of Administration Policy (SAP) against the House passed United Nations Reform Act of 2005, which would have automatically withheld dues from the UN unless certain specific reforms were met, including switching to a voluntary system. The Bush Administration said that it had "serious concerns" about the legislation because it "could detract from and undermine our efforts," and "asks that Congress reconsider this legislation." Similarly, in 2011, during a House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing on UN Reform, Ambassador Mark Wallace, President George W. Bush's Representative for UN Management and Reform, said that it would not be "wise or beneficial to use withholding funds to implement change."

This is a critical time in U.S.-UN relations. The U.S. has an opportunity to work with a new, reform-minded Secretary-General who has made it clear that he intends to prioritize flexibility, transparency, and innovation at the world's most vital diplomatic body. Together with the Secretariat and through sustained American engagement, the UN will be better positioned to reform its operations, respond to global crises, reduce America's military footprint, and ensure the entire international community does its fair part in pursuit of a more peaceful world.