

# Remarks by President Obama and U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon After Meeting

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**PRESIDENT OBAMA:** Well, it is wonderful to have the opportunity to welcome my good friend, Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, to the Oval Office. He and I consult quite frequently and in various multilateral settings, but this has been a useful opportunity for us to talk more specifically about how the United States and the United Nations can work together.

Let me first of all say that I think I speak for world leaders in a wide variety of countries when I say that the Secretary General has shown outstanding leadership during what has been one of the most challenging and turbulent times in international affairs. I think he's fair-minded. I think he has shown a willingness to tackle tough issues and to speak hard truths, and I very much appreciate personally the work that he's done.

Sometimes people ask why the United States is so devoted to the United Nations, and, obviously, beyond the fact that we helped set up the United Nations, what was true 60, 70 years ago is still true today. And that is that without a forum for discussion, negotiation, and diplomacy, the world is a worse place, and it is very much in the United States' interests to ensure that international norms, rules of the road, and humanitarian norms are observed. And the United Nations gives us a critical opportunity to try to prevent conflict, create peace, maintain stability -- all of which ultimately is good for America's security and America's prosperity.

We discussed a wide range of issues during this meeting. We started with Syria, where obviously the humanitarian crisis has gotten worse. And Secretary General Ban and I shared the view that we are at a critical juncture; that it is important for us to bring about an effective political transition that would respect the rights of all Syrians; and that, in the interim, it's important for us to try to eliminate some of the carnage that's been taking place directed at civilians and non-combatants.

And so we'll be strategizing about how the United Nations -- or the United States -- which is the largest donor to the humanitarian assistance in Syria, and is also a strong supporter of the more moderate elements of the Syrian Opposition -- can work together with the United Nations to bring about if not a full resolution to the crisis, at least an improvement for the people of Syria and lay the foundation for a kind of political transition that is necessary.

We had an opportunity to discuss North Korea, where the Secretary General obviously has an important political interest but also a personal interest as a native of the Republic of Korea. And we both agree that now is the time for North Korea to end the kind of belligerent approach that they've been taking, and to try to lower temperatures -- nobody wants to see a conflict on the Korean Peninsula. But it's important for North Korea, like every other country in the world, to observe the basic rules and norms that are set forth, including a wide variety of U.N. resolutions that have passed. And we will continue to try to work to resolve some of those issues diplomatically, even as I indicated to the Secretary General that the United States will take all necessary steps to protect its people and to meet our obligations under our alliances in the region.

We talked about Middle East peace, where there is at least a window of opportunity for both Israelis and Palestinians to get back to the peace table. And we explored how the United States, as a strong friend of Israel and a supporter of a Palestinian state, can work with the United Nations and other multilateral bodies to try to move that process forward.

And we also had an opportunity to talk more broadly about an issue that affects every country, and that is climate change. And I appreciate very much the Secretary General's leadership on that front.

The last point I'd make is that the Secretary General has actually shown significant progress in U.N. reform -- making the institution more efficient, more effective. I think the Secretary General would be the first to acknowledge that there is more work to do on that front, but he is making an earnest effort in making progress. And we very much appreciate that and encourage that to continue, because we think we need a strong, healthy United Nations, but at a time when all the member countries are under severe fiscal constraints, we want to make sure, obviously, that the United Nations is operating as efficiently as possible.

So, overall, I found it to be a very useful conversation, and I want to thank, once again, the Secretary General for his leadership. The Secretary General has been quoted as saying that there is no opt-out clause to the great challenges that we face around the world, and I assured him that the United States of America, as the largest economy and the most powerful military in the world, has no intention of opting out any time soon.

We have a deep interest in making sure that the United Nations and the various international institutions that we have are functioning effectively, because when they do, the United States does well and all its partner countries do well. And so I'm looking forward to continuing to support his efforts in any way that I can.

Thank you very much.

SECRETARY GENERAL BAN: Thank you, thank you very much, Mr. President. I really appreciate President Obama for inviting me to the Oval Office, and I really appreciate your global leadership to make this world more peaceful, more prosperous, and where all human rights are protected and respected.

The United Nations and the United States share common goals in peace and security, human rights and development. In that regard, I really appreciate such a strong leadership and cooperation and support of the U.S. government and President Obama. You and the American people care about the world of justice, freedom, and opportunity for all. I am very confident that the partnership between the United Nations and the United States is now making very solid foundation and strong and stronger, and I count on your continuing support on that.

As President Obama has just explained in detailed manner, I do not have much to add to all the subjects, but if I may just say a few words from my own perspective as the Secretary General. On Syria, this is the most troubling situation, where all the leaders of the world should really take much more strengthened leadership on. I have asked President Obama to demonstrate and exercise his stronger leadership in working together with the key partners of the Security Council.

As the Secretary General, I have been working very closely with Joint Special Representative, Lakhdar Brahimi, and I will continue to do that. Unfortunately, this crisis, having entered a third year, in the absence of a political solution, we have seen well over 70,000 people be killed, and more than 50 percent of schools, hospitals, and all infrastructures have been destroyed. More than 6 million people have been internally displaced, and we have 1.3 million refugees around the neighboring countries of Syria. This continuing military struggle as well as intensifying this sectarian war -- make us really worried that unless we stop this violence, this whole Syrian society may be destroyed. We have been mobilizing all possible humanitarian assistance, and I really appreciate President Obama and his government's very generous support on this humanitarian assistance.

On chemical weapons investigation, it's regrettable that the Syrian government has rejected my offer to engage in an investigation. This is my authority in accordance with the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. I sincerely hope that the Syrian government will allow so that this investigation team will be able to conduct investigation, as requested by them. And I have received requests from other member states. That's why I have already assembled very experienced experts as a team. They are now ready. They can be deployed any time soon. So this is my original plan.

On the situation in and around the Korean Peninsula, I am deeply concerned, and we share such a grave concern together on these continuing tensions on the Korean Peninsula. I urge the DPRK authorities to refrain from making any further provocative

(inaudible) and rhetoric. This is not helpful. And I really highly commended President Obama's firm, principled, but measured response in close consultation with the Republic of Korea government and with strong engagement with neighboring countries like China.

We hope that more of the countries, including China, who may have influence over North Korea, can exercise their leadership and influence so that this situation will be resolved peacefully. First and foremost, tension levels must come down. North Korea should not confront the international community as they are now doing. I hope that concerned parties, including the United States, China, the Republic of Korea, and Russia, and Japan will continue to work together on this matter.

On Middle East, I really appreciate President Obama's initiative to visit the region. We need to do more of our efforts to fully utilize the generated momentum by President Obama's visit so that a two-state solution can be successfully implemented as soon as possible.

On climate change, I intend to work very closely with the member states so that the legally binding global treaty can be achieved by the end of 2015. And for that possible -- to facilitate this process, I intend to convene a leaders meeting sometime next year. I have invited President Obama. I invited him to play a very important leadership role for humanity.

As far as the United Nations reform is concerned, we will continue to make this organization more effective, efficient, accountable, and more trustworthy. I thank you for your leadership.

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4:01 P.M. EDT