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Alex Marquardt

You've noted, you just came out from New York, but you just got back from Cairo as well. And there are actually a lot of subjects that we'd like to get to, but I would like to start with Gaza, and the conference that was just held in Cairo, enhanced humanitarian response. You said, in the wake of the conference, that what we're seeing may well amount to the gravest international crimes. The aid that we're seeing going into Gaza is at some of the lowest level of those levels that we've seen since the war began. Israel is rejecting accusations that are not allowing enough aid in; they blame armed gangs and Hamas for disrupting the flow of aid. How do you see the situation?

Amina J. Mohammed

Well, at least, thank you for having me. But as we just said in Cairo, it's horrendous. What we talk about today is human access, and we're acknowledging, from the very beginning of the atrocities that have happened on October 7, we acknowledge that, we acknowledge that we need to have the hostages released unconditionally. But when it comes to humanitarian law and what is happening in Gaza, to get into Gaza and to provide the humanitarian aid to everyone is essential and way, way, way below what we need, you might get past the processing of these are done by because of the looting, because the inability for trucks are going whether it is fuel trucks that are limited or it is the food trucks that are limited and now we see not even the bakeries have a sufficient to say, to stay productive. It's getting colder and wet and it's catastrophic. It really is. And today, our briefings from our teams there are, you know, what more can we do to push it? And in Cairo, it was very frustrating. We all came. I think it was a great that the Egyptians got the conference on last minute, but important to keep the momentum going and to have still the generosity of many nations, over \$200 million, but really where I was limited at that meeting. But with that, you need to get the aid in. And to get aid in, it's got to go past the border to get access to it.

Marquardt

I think some of the scenes we've all seen in Gaza between the past week are some of the most desperate and disheartening that we've seen since the beginning of war. There is an accusation against the United Nations by the Israelis that you are not bringing enough aid to those crossings in order to get those... how do you respond to that?

Mohammed

We bring as much aid as we can to those crossings, and I think that that's unsafe for us, because the trucks are there, the food is there, the aid is there, but it takes extraordinary amounts of effort to get it across, and many days across it is today, as you know, with Kerem Shalom, we've had to close our aid going through there because it doesn't survive across the border. We need to be safe. Our humanitarians need to be able to get in there and to give it to people, and not to see the loss of life with the looting, because but that comes a lot more security challenges as well for those around we saw what is happening in one of bakeries losing, you know, a woman and her children just recently. But no, I can tell you that aid that is needed is what we would deliver if it was possible.

Marquardt

So where are the hurdles? Is it inspections? Is it de confliction? Is it the lack of quantity that then leads to the living?

Mohammed

All of the above, as we say in my country. It is every one of those things. Deconfliction doesn't happen as it should. We are seeing many people that are losing their lives on these very roads. There are clear agreements that these are safe and then they're not safe. While I was in Cairo, we were losing another family of one of our staff who was trying to get just one kilometer. And given okay, you can go, you can take your family, three daughters, a son and his wife, and then came the raids. And those raids left came without a wife and three daughters, and only a son survived. So deconfliction is challenged. The amount of aid that we have, we continue to need more. And I think one of the... political will too to be able to have that. We saw that when we had a vaccination campaign, polio, it worked. We had a stop, it started again, it worked. But we need to do this for children, filming for the people who are there to allow that through, to make that happen is stalling.

Marquardt

How much staff have you lost?

Mohammed

Humanitarians over 350, about 251 is UNRWA, the UN I would say, and the majority of them are UNRWA. But I look again at the numbers of journalists that have been lost, and really the toll is very high, and it grows every day. It grows every day. There's no end to it.

Marquardt

There were all manner of different delegations who were sent to this conference in Cairo. US did not send a title delegation that we have us represented by the ambassador. How did you read that?

Mohammed

I think, you know, look, we were, I think the meeting itself was last minute. But this is an urgent, this is an urgent requirement for us to be there, to keep the momentum. And I think we would have hoped for higher representation there. We did have some many countries. Denmark came at the Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister who will be taking the security council leadership next month. That was important for us. Very important signals of foreign ministers from Brazil, from Colombia and all the Arab states, they were there, very high levels, at some cases. Gave them to caucus around issues on Syria, which has become the latest of our flash points. So like you know, we could have done more. It's very difficult to go and not to see the results of one expects. Ambitions are very high. Expectations are very high, but they're just not the political muscle that we need to go.

Marquardt

One of the ambitions of the outgoing Biden administration is to try to move forward the ceasefire and hostage deal and in some way, which you just mentioned. Obviously Egypt is a key player in that. Do you get any sense of any kind of progress, any kind of movement, flexibility on either sides in the past few days?

Mohammed

Discussions, at least with Egypt, and we commend our leadership with Hamas, while we were there, mostly the other discussions and associations to try to get the Rafah crossing opened and after 1000 trucks as they can go through that. We'll pass a lot of discussions on humanitarian reviving the ceasefire. One hope that we will come back to that after Lebanon, that was, was successful so far, and we keep, you know, holding onto our seats for that. But yes, I think there are, you know, every time you see movement, there is hope. It's not enough. It's, you know, often too little too late. But this is hope. We need the ceasefire we keep plugging on and talking about it.

Marquardt

What about the status of UNRWA? Obviously, there have been many, many allegations against Israel, about publicity with Hamas, about schools and warehouses being used by Hamas members, of course, participating in October 7. What do you make of those allegations?

Mohammed

I think we've said this, that the Secretary General has said it over and over again, that anything that has been said against, we have looked into, we have helped people to account, but by and UNRWA is indispensable. This is the Palestinian people. This is their hope. It delivers services, 16,000 visits a day, is what UNRWA does. And this is Palestinian people, Palestinian families, and I think that we need to take cognizance of that today. It's not the same services as it was a year ago. Today's services are to amputees, children, women, people who don't know tomorrow, and this is all UNRWA and people in the UN know that it is irreplaceable. It's just not possible. And so I think that we need to take this seriously. We are, of course, very concerned about the law and the message that's gone through and has the January 30 deadline, and we hope that we can continue to engage with the Israeli government to rescind it, because, you know, we don't know what will happen the day after that to be chaotic. Quite frankly it will be chaotic.

Marquardt

And of course, they don't just work in Gaza. They work in the West Bank. They work in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, wherever there are Palestinian refugees. UNRWA was already on the ropes, is already on the ropes, and now you have an incoming administration that will likely be more hostile, with a supportive Congress to the hostility. Do you think UNRWA can survive?

Mohammed

I think there is.. Nelson Mandela said that it always seems impossible until it's done, right? So I'm not one to give up on this, and I know that, you know, President Elect Donald Trump was here before, and the engagement with the UN, where people thought things were impossible, we had an engagement on things we agreed on things we didn't agree we moved. And I hope that we can bring the case for why UNRWA is needed, and perhaps get a reversal that, that you know, begin to appreciate the role to play, and this is not the place to go if one wants to continue to save lives.

Marquardt

Could be repackaged in a way that could where American support could continue, perhaps under another name?

Mohammed

You know, a few weeks ago at the UN General Assembly, we put forward a pact of the future, and it was about us saying, after 75 years, what does the UN look like? Does it need to change? Yes, it did. We reiterated the, you know, importance of the development agenda, but we also bought that technology, the peace of security agenda that needed to change, governance of the international financial system, in the same way UNRWA after this many years, can we do better? Absolutely. Without UNRWA? Absolutely not. So, yes, I think that we can, we can have a discussion on how to be more efficient, more responsive in this new set and the day after in

Palestine and Gaza is going to be very different from what we have been doing just even a year ago.

Marquardt

Now looking farther north in Lebanon, just this week an official from UNIFIL, the peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, told CNN that there were more than 100 Israeli violations of the ceasefire that just went into effect. There have been some Hezbollah violations as well. Here we are a week or so later. How do you think... do you think this ceasefire is going okay? Will it survive?

Mohammed

Well, it's holding as fast as it can. And yes, there are, on both sides, what you would say, breaches of it. But UNIFIL, this is a mission of the United Nations. Full Force, over 48 countries are in that mission trying to make sure that they monitor, they document, and that's important, because there's always a day of reckoning for this. But they have to try to help the Lebanese armed forces to hold us as close as we can to the agreement and keep a ceasefire on.

Marquardt

That was so much of what Resolution 1701 was based on, and, of course, there are accusations that UNIFIL has not done its job since 2006 and enforcing that. So what is different this time?

Mohammed

What's different is Gaza and how this is spilled over into Lebanon, the issues that we have seen on the table for the ceasefire and we will have to come back and look at how we implement 1701 and hopefully we can do that in a much more constructive way. I think UNIFIL has done the best it possibly can under the circumstances and will continue to try to support there.

Marquardt

I mean, does UNIFIL plan... how can they enforce a more robust peacekeeping observing mechanism to make sure that the ceasefire is upheld, that 1701 is enforced the way that they are supposed to be?

Mohammed

Reconciling that with the cease fire that we have now is what kind of states have to address and they will get the muscle that is needed for them to do their job in the circumstances that they have pretty tough. We are out there every day and as we often say, there are two sides to the two UN's. The UN that negotiates processes in New York or Geneva, but it's there is the UN

that's on the front lines, and Lebanon, even though it's on the front lines, on humanitarian works on the front lines. And you try to reference other two what you agreeing and getting implemented as another story.

Marquardt

Next month, there will be new administration officials and future officials talking about enacting this America First agenda on day one. What do you think it will mean for the United Nations?

Mohammed

Well I think first and foremost, congratulations to President-elect, that this was an election he won and when he comes in as not only as host, as he comes in as a major player in the United Nations in which they own a large percentage of and there is an engagement that we need to have and we will see that. We will see, as his representative comes into the United Nations, the discussions we will have on the things that we hopefully can agree and many things that perhaps we will not agree. But this will not be the first time that we've engaged with member states that perhaps do not agree with where the UN is today. But we need to have that discussion. We need to engage. We are not going to go undercover. We will stand tall. We have a charter. It's not done so well with a few [UNINTELLIGIBLE] thrown at it. But frankly, what else do you have? This is more than one state. This it's 196 states. Each has a voice. Might not all have the same muscle, but that's important, that that space is there and that everyone hears it and I hope that when the administration comes in, as they have before, they are the same.

Marquardt

But it's more than just a country that's coming in, or administration rather, that is coming in, that is...that has differences with the United Nations. This is an administration that will likely be openly hostile. You will have probably an ambassador who may be more hostile to the United Nations than we have ever seen before in Congresswoman Elise Stefanik. Recently she accused, accused the UN, as you know, of antisemitic rot. In a situation like that when, as you say, they are such huge stakeholders, how do you anticipate working with the future, potentially future, ambassador Stefanik?

Mohammed

I think there'll be a lot to do with how member states will embrace the new representatives that comes from the US and the issues that they put on the table. And with the Secretary General, we will pick up where we left off. And I think that we were not in a bad place in the last... at the last term that we had with President-elect Donald Trump. It will be tough. But, you know, let's go back in history. This is not the worst ambassador rhetoric that we've had, right? I mean, this is something that... in those days. I mean, everyone was horrified. But in fact, as time goes, as you engage and as member states engage, and there is much more at stake on the table, and

your understanding of this world is so connected that it is in the interest of all parties to find a pathway forward that you cannot just come in. You might think you can come in by the time that has discussions, that they can realize what the lay of the land is, and hopefully will change direction.

Marquardt

Are there specifics that you learned in the last administration Trump 1.0 that that you will use to your advantage in learning how to navigate Trump 2.0?

Mohammed

Well, when we came in 2017 one of the things that we said we wanted to do was the reforms to make us more fit for purpose, more responsive, management, development, peace and security. And I think if there was any learning there, that was common ground that we had, because you'll see a tweet, if you go into the archives, where President-elect Donald Trump said, "Let's make the UN great again." Acknowledgement, the UN great again. Well, I hope that we can do that together. I think what we did learn is engage. And you know, in that dispensation, we were up here at the invitation of the president-elect on many times, including the Security Council. I think that's, you know, there's something to be said for that, there was a willingness, as we engaged, to move things forward and try to get it. We didn't agree on everything, but I think we got further than we thought.

Marquardt

How concerned are you about US financing?

Mohammed

I would be very concerned. It's a large part of the funding that we have. I'm concerned that, you know, the US would not continue to fund. It would be reducing a lot of what we do on the front lines of the humanitarian work that we do for women, for girls, for countries in conflict and crisis. There is so much more that is happening now, that has been happening before. We've not been able to put the resources in, for the commitments we've made in the past, and if the US steps back, that makes a big difference. And we hope that we'll be able to convince them that it is in everyone's interests that they don't.

Marquardt

Stefanik is one of numerous American officials, Republicans, who have accused the UN of anti-semitism, of anti-Israel bias that has only grown in the past year-plus. How do you respond to those accusations?

Mohammed

No, I of course, we will reject those accusations. We don't believe that we're anti-semitic at all. We just finished holding the civilizations meeting in Portugal. We are about diversity. We are about representing everyone and leaving no one out of this. But we do have a charter, and we have resolutions, and we have agreements that everyone has been part of in moving forward. And there is what you have to do that is right, and if you do wrong, humanitarian law is breached, that we have to say so. Now, if that is anti-semitic, well, then that's a problem. I think we need to see what it is and that is trying to hold on to international law. It is what keeps us all together as this global family. We are too interconnected not to have those guardrails. And those guardrails work for everyone, and I think that that's something that we need to protect, including the space that we have in the UN and I hope that we'll be able to convince her differently as she comes into the UN and understands it better.

Marquardt

I'd like to ask you about COP29, the recent conference in Baku, which was an interesting place to hold it. There was no follow up on fossil fuels in the final text. What more do you think might have gotten done that didn't there?

Mohammed

First, I think we should harvest what we did get done. We didn't think we didn't get a number over \$100 billion that has been contested in the past. We thought we might get a lot more than \$300 billion as we went through negotiations. Clearly, the global south don't feel done right, and this is not enough for them to leverage the kind of investments that need to be made to mitigate and to adapt to climate change, because what we have, how can we leverage that? And that's what we're working out now. Whereas the real meat in it and how can we move it forward. As for the mitigation issues around the emissions, I think it's very important for us to focus on we have 190-odd countries in that room that are negotiating COP, and we will go to COP 30 next year with NDCs that should be economy wide, so we get close to 1.5 but the real number of countries that we need to address have 87% of those emissions of 35 countries. And we need to focus on that. It is G20 plus fifteen. And if we can focus on that, we'll get close to 1.5. And some of those countries have rolled back on the commitments that they've made. Some countries are going greener, but they're exporting brown. And we have to find a balance of, you know, how much of this will continue to go on in those countries for us not to lose a 1.5 degrees just hanging threat. But I think COP29 yet is sufficient to go out the door to try to make the next one year, which has a number of opportunities for us to continue to strengthen that until we get to Brazil in COP30. We have the finances for development that can lift the climate agenda. There is climate finance being discussed there. And climate finance is not in a silo. This is about food systems. This is about energy transitions. It is about connectivity. So climate finance is also development finance. And I think you'll see more about that in June in Spain than we have the Financing for the Development conference. More to come. The G20 has been led by South Africa, it's the last of the five from the Global South. It's going to be an interesting troika, because we have Brazil,

South Africa and the US. So that, we hope, will help to shape what comes thereafter. But to South Africa, they are very clear that they will take on climate finance and take on debt, for which many African countries are on debt row, and this is a big crisis for many, and they will take on equality.

Marquardt

We only have a couple moments, but I first have to ask about Sudan. And just this week, there were reports of at least two days. I believe they're shellings on the Zamzam camp. This is the only location where famine has been declared this year, I believe. What progress are you seeing in terms of getting the warring sides to allow more aid in?

Mohammad

Well, the crisis, the atrocities, the famine that are being committed in Sudan, you said quite rightly, is man made right? So let's underscore "man," two generals and two generals who believe that this is about them winning the war, and each one thinks that they are going to win it, and off the backs of their people. Horrendous things are happening there. What we saw three months ago, I visited after the Secretary General got that opening that we may be able to get the Adre crossing opened and in visiting we did, and we took those trucks across from Chad into Sudan. It was the rainy season, so pretty tough. We have a new head of our humanitarian agency who went in there just a few days ago and has been able to get many more openings to get aid in. So there's a humanitarian crisis, but there is also a crisis of getting these two generals to the table to have a ceasefire and to negotiate a way back to democratic rule. There is a gentler declaration that should be one that we all get behind to try to get implemented, but very difficult at this point in time. Hopefully we will see more, more from the UN in terms of our Security Council to try to make this work.

Marquardt

Last question, there was a writer's report today about the World Food Program. This was based on internal reports saying that there are a range of problems in the Sudan response. An inability to scale up its operations, missed funding opportunities, and what is described as anti-fraud challenges. Are those issues being addressed?

Mohammad

Yes, they are. And when I went in there a few months ago, that was something that was raised, and since then, we have been looking into that, and everything will be done to make sure that we get to the bottom of it. Not all of it is going to be as we see, and have said there will be explanations for much of it. The World Food Program does amazing work, but it is not perfect either. What we have to make sure is that we have checks and balances that will keep our donors fully aware of how accountable this organization has to be and we will get to the bottom

of it, but our humanitarian agencies, for the better part of it, we do save lives and livelihoods across the world.

Marquardt

UN Deputy-Secretary General Amina Mohammed, thank you so much.

Mohammad

Thank you.