

# We the Peoples|

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Good evening! Welcome. It is wonderful to see you all tonight.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary-General, for your warm words – the United Nations Foundation is indeed determined to be on the ‘frontlines’ at this time of challenge and change. We are grateful for your leadership and for the privilege of working so closely with you, our UN friends and partners – and everyone who believes in the indispensability of the UN in a turbulent world.

We are joined tonight by distinguished guests and friends from across the UN family – Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed ... leaders across the UN system, ambassadors from every region, members of the UN Foundation Board, business, philanthropy, media and the arts, so many colleagues and friends, and of course, our incredible honorees.

We are grateful to our partners and supporters, our co-chairs tonight – Hans Vestberg, Chairman and CEO of Verizon and UN Foundation Board Member, and Laura Turner Seydel, Director of the Turner Foundation, also a UN Foundation Board Member, and daughter of Ted Turner ... and of course we are always ever grateful to Ted.

Ted is a sailor, and like any good sailor (and he is a great sailor), the horizon is his reference point. Seeing where the earth meets the sky, even at great distance, helps tell you how to tack. Having a “north star” turns out to be important too. Important when it’s calm but even more if you’re sailing into headwinds.

For Ted, the ultimate north star was the United Nations – not only as an institution, but as an idea. The big, bold, brave idea that people achieve more, and their countries thrive more, when they can count on a bedrock of cooperation that puts guardrails around our worst impulses and creates opportunities for our highest aspirations.

We all know what the UN can accomplish ... what we all can accomplish when we work together. It wasn't that long ago that we lifted a billion people out of poverty ... we eradicated diseases like smallpox ... we got girls in schools, closed the ozone hole ... advanced fundamental rights. We ended wars. We set visionary goals like the SDGs ... We have kept the nuclear peace.

Now, today is tougher. We face complex new challenges.

We see all too clearly that every advance we have made is vulnerable. To setbacks, pushbacks, and rollbacks.

Global cooperation itself is under threat as never before, just when we need it most.

It's important to be clear, in a moment like this, that global cooperation, multilateralism, isn't a sentimental attachment. It isn't gratuitous or just a 'nice to have.' It's an absolutely essential condition for meeting the basic needs of every country and people, in good times and especially in bad. That's why delegates in this town fought so hard to agree to a Pact for the Future this September. This isn't a system designed because we're all friends – it's designed precisely because we sometimes are not.

Ted Turner created the UN Foundation nearly 30 years ago because he had seen that to be true time and again.

Today, as we look to our collective prospects, we have important choices to make. Whether we "heal our divisions," in the words of the Secretary-General, or exploit them. Whether we "open the doors of opportunity" for all, or just some. Whether we keep faith with the extraordinary progress we have made ... and resolve, even across differences, to secure and expand it.

Tonight's honorees all exemplify that resolve. In their lives and their work, they have shown up in remarkable ways ... to inspire, inform, energize, nourish, unify, and literally save people. They are all bridge-builders who reach across aisles and divides to find common ground. The UN Charter calls on us to "combine our efforts" ... and to "unite our strengths," and this evening's recipients have all answered that call.

We are now 25 years into our new century. The future is uncertain, but that means it's also

open. And our vibrant planet teeming with life and possibility needs *us* to answer the same [call].

That is our north star at the UN Foundation.

So thank you again for being with us tonight. We are grateful for your partnership and friendship, always inspired by your achievements, and eager to “unite our strengths” for progress in the days and years ahead.

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