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2. Thanks/recognition
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4. Pre-conference meetings: Bulgaria, Tehran and Pakistan
5. NGOs as a vehicle for action/cooperation
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7. solidarity and 11 september/last year volunteerism
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Thank you Mr. Under-Secretary-General for giving me the floor, and thank you to all of the speakers who have spoken so eloquently this morning.

Dear Colleagues and friends,

Good morning. It is my pleasure, as Chair of the Conference, to formally welcome you all to the 55th Annual DPI/NGO Conference.

I am happy to be the last speaker at this opening session, and I will keep my remarks brief. It would be remiss of me not to begin by giving thanks to the dedicated planning committee members that unselfishly gave of their time to make this event possible. I would like to ask all members of the Conference Planning Committee to please stand and be recognized.

Thank you all for your efforts.

I would also like to thank Mr. Paul Hoeffel, my co-chair of the Conference Planning Committee, and his staff, including the dozen or so interns, who have worked tirelessly with our committee to bring this Conference to fruition.

However, our largest debt of gratitude is owed to you, the participants, who have travelled from all parts of the world, at

great expense to yourselves and your organizations, to attend what is sure to be an outstanding Conference. It warms my heart to gaze upon this sea of faces representing all facets and expressions of our world community. The list of participants that we all received in our Conference kits, indicates that 2,355 people registered for this year's Conference. Actually, as of today, over 2,700 people have registered, representing over 650 organizations in 85 countries from all regions of the world. These figures demonstrate the remarkable international representation that we have collectively achieved over the past decade.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the many organizations that desired to be here with us today, but were unable to join us as they were denied visas. Hopefully, this perennial problem will be reversed. On a brighter note, there have been or will be several regional meetings in parallel with our Conference theme. Such meetings have taken place in Iran, Bulgaria, Pakistan and Lebanon.

There are those in the world at large who believe that our participation in a Conference such as this, is an exercise in futility. They believe that Human kind will never alter its present course. Our presence here today and our commitment to the ongoing process of peace and cooperation to build a better world belies the cries of our critics.

We stand on the shoulders of all of those of all faiths, religions, races and persuasion who believed that there is a better way to reconcile our differences than resorting to death and destruction. Building on their foundation, we are here to employ the use of our collective knowledge in devising a new strategy to rebuild societies. The information we gain and the partnerships we make over the next three days will leave us better prepared to build a new global dynamic that can repair damaged societies and prevent these conflicts from happening again.

We are acutely aware of the events that happened one-year ago this week. Many of us were here last year at this same time for the 54th Annual Conference, which focused on volunteerism. Our volunteer spirit united us in that trying time, and our volunteer spirit unites us today. Our Conference theme this year unites us in a shared responsibility for people affected by conflict across the globe.

This Conference will strive to compel us beyond memorial services to establishing legacies of understanding and triumph over uncivil society. In sum, our being here today is not idle chit chat. It is action; it is engagement; it is commitment; it is solidarity.

Thank you all for being here, and again, welcome to the Conference.

Before I end, there are a number of announcements that are quite important. First, all of you received a survey in your Conference kit. This survey is the best way we have to receive feedback from all of you so that we can improve the Conference. Please take the time to fill it out as the Conference progresses. There will be a box in Conference Room 4 and the NGO Resource Centre to place the surveys, or you can hand them to any staff member.

Second, as you may have heard, the Secretary-General is hosting a memorial service on Wednesday morning, to which we have all been invited. As a result, Panel 4 on Wednesday morning will begin promptly at 10:45 a.m. and will go until 1:00 p.m. The rest of the day's schedule will proceed as outlined in your programme.

Third, if you speak Spanish and need assistance with translation in the midday workshops, the organization PILAC has agreed to provide translation services. Please ask one of the Conference Staff to identify a member of PILAC.

