I will depart from my written notes and speak freely after some reflections on the introductions given by my fellow panelists.

I would first like to take you back to 1993. In spite of what Salil’s press statement said about the awaiting disaster, I would say there was a lot of hope, a lot of anticipation in 1993 because the world had changed so drastically, as we all recall. We had seen the end of the Cold War, the Wall had tumbled down in this neighbourhood and, remember, apartheid had been abolished. And here I can’t refrain from saying that this was thanks to the determined, wise and visionary leadership of a person who is in our thoughts and prayers right at this moment, Nelson Mandela.

So there were the anticipations, the new world we were going to create and it was in this spirit 7,000 people met here. But let us also remember, there are valleys and there are mountains – we had horrible conflicts, atrocities taking place about a couple of hundred kilometres away from here, in the Balkans.

I was, myself, Emergency Relief Coordinator in the UN and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs – I saw the worst things I had ever seen in my life in Somalia. We were involved in the horrible war in Angola at the time with huge and abhorrent abuses of human rights. And let’s remember, only a few years later, we saw genocide. We saw Srebrenica and we saw Rwanda. So this was a very important point - possibility of a turning point.

I think the Vienna Declaration was indeed a turning point and there was so much that was achieved at the meeting that our fellow panellists have described, but I would also say that there was so much momentum given to the human rights causes after Vienna. The High Commissioner’s Office was instituted and here I want to commend Navi Pillay for her principled, courageous and indefatigable work in the pursuit of human rights.

I myself was President of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2005 and 2006 where we established the three pillars of the work of the United Nations and put them on the same level. There is no peace without development, there is no development without peace and there is no lasting peace to sustainable development without respect of human rights. And I would add today, the rule of law.

These three pillars constitute healthy societies and healthy international order. If one of these pillars is weak, the whole structure is weak. We have to work with all three at the same time if we are to maintain security, stability and giving people rights and lives of dignity for all.

In that document, we also established a norm which hopefully someday will be full international law - namely the responsibility to protect - which was part of that document and is still there. In spite of discussions about its validity in Libya, I would say it’s alive and it will be alive. Adama Deng, our representative here can confirm that. There was a debate last year and hardly anyone spoke against, in spite of the Libya experience and, in spite, I would say, of what happens in Syria.

The Human Rights Council instituted something important – I remember we had a struggle for that – the arduous, difficult negotiations – and that was the universal periodic review that every country’s human rights record had to be reviewed. And let’s also remember the great progress with ratification of human rights treaties. They have tripled since 1993 and the special procedure system has doubled. And Salil [Shetty] mentioned also the womens’ rights that got that extra momentum. And the fight against impunity, of course, the ICC and the other bodies in that area.

But…but, today, we have work to do. There are victims of war crimes in Syria, in Mali, in DRC. There are mass rapes in several countries, DRC is another example of that. Child soldiers are systematically recruited. Trafficking of men, women and children for slave labour or prostitution is rampant – a big business, I may say. Freedom of speech is threatened in many places, girls’ rights denied - the Malala [Yousafzai] example from Pakistan is a striking one, isn’t it? And persecution of persons
because of their ethnic, religious background or sexual orientation. And let us welcome the Supreme Court’s decision, ruling yesterday in the United States, by the way.

And I would say generally, we are getting used to violence. There is a wave of brutalization going over the world. We are seeing figures of people being killed, innocent men, women and children in great numbers and we get used to it. We almost get numb. They end up on page 16 in a small little note. We must put an end to this prioritization. We must recall the spirit of 1993. I realize that we still have enormously much to do. And that’s why it is so good to have in this room so many activists, so many representatives, both of governments and international organizations, private sector, civil society and the academic world, because we need all to give our contributions. Nobody can do everything, but everybody can do something. And this we have to realize.

So, I would just want to conclude by saying how grateful I am that this meeting takes place and I think it will serve its best purpose, Mr. Vice Chancellor and Navi, my dear friend, if it gives us extra energy to take on the continued work, to go to the next stage of the fight for human dignity. We have many challenges like, for instance, in the United Nations, the road ahead for development after 2015, where, of course, poverty eradication and sustainability will be key elements. But I also would claim that there is a need to have the rights perspective in that work, including the very important work of the rule of law.

And we will also try and improve our work. We need to do that every day in the United Nations to see how we are better prepared for human rights violations and our preparedness to deal with them – I’m heading a group working on exactly that – so that we will be better prepared, both in human rights violations situations, but also protection of civilians.

So we all have work to do when we get out of this room, but I think that it was good that we collected our thoughts and that we were all inspired by some of the words from my fellow panelists here. Thank you very much.