



**H.E. Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al-Thani
Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, State of Qatar**

**Launching HOPE, a Humanitarian Operation Initiative
to Provide Immediate Assistance After Natural Disasters**

Moderator

Terje Rød-Larsen, President of the International Peace Institute

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TRANSCRIPT

Welcome and Introductory Remarks:

Mr. Terje Rød-Larsen, *President of the International Peace Institute*

Presenter:

H.E. Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al-Thani, *Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, State of Qatar*

Terje Rød-Larsen: Good Afternoon Everybody, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends & Colleagues. It is indeed a great pleasure for me to welcome to the International Peace Institute the Prime Minister for foreign affairs of the state of Qatar Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jaber Al Thani. I would also like to say that Sheikh Hamad is a very good friend of ours and of course most importantly in addition to all his other functions he is a longstanding member of IPI's International Advisory Board.

We are extremely pleased that you have accepted our invitation to speak about your initiative HOPE which is a major humanitarian operation initiative to provide immediate assistance after natural disasters. This is a topic of particular importance and there is a need to strengthen international efforts to deliver quick and efficient disaster relief. We are looking very much forward to hearing your views on this new initiative and how to develop it.

By way of introduction I would also like to mention other issues of interest for our participants here. And let me just say a few words in order to commend the contribution of Qatar in addressing crises in the Middle East and Beyond.

Sheikh Hamad, you have demonstrated your commitment to the international dialogue of peace and to peace itself by presiding over many international conferences and meetings, which were held in Doha, your capital. These include the Doha Forum, the Doha Inter-Faith Conference, and the Conference on New or Restored Democracies.

Qatar has played a key role as a Peace Broker in conflicts such as in Lebanon two years ago and more recently in Darfur.

For over a year Doha has been the site of peace talks between the Government of Sudan and various fighting factions in Darfur leading to the signature of a cease fire in February between the Sudanese government and the Justice and Equality Movement.

Not far from Sudan in the Horn of Africa, Eritrea and Djibouti signed again under the auspices of Qatar only three days ago an agreement settling the border conflict.

I'd like to use this occasion to commend your efforts, Sheikh Hamad. Before I give you the floor, let me remind our participants that the Prime Minister will give his address in Arabic, we have arranged for dual translation service and you will find all of you headsets available on your chairs. Following the Prime Minister's remarks the question and answer session will be in English.

It is now my great pleasure to give the floor to the prime minister for his remarks on this important humanitarian issue. Prime minister the floor is yours.

Sheikh Al-Thani:

Thank you very much. In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Humanity suffers from natural disasters, like droughts, earthquakes, floods, forest fires, and Tsunamis.

Natural disasters, like those have recently struck on all continents, leave a trail of destruction on their wake.

No country is immune, and no country can cope with these forces alone.

Scientists tell us that because of climate change we can expect even more frequent natural disasters in the future. There is no way to predict where and when. But you can be sure that it is only a matter of time until the next catastrophe strikes.

So, we have to ask: are we prepared?

This year's earthquake in Haiti offers some lessons. The world watched in horror at the scenes of devastation – more than 200,000 Haitians killed, and tragedy for the United Nations that lost 100 staff. There was a vast outpouring of sympathy and solidarity, matched by huge amounts of aid.

For its parts, Qatar sent a C-17 aircraft loaded with 50 tones of urgent relief materials to Haiti, along with a rescue team. This is in addition to 20 Million Dollars which the State of Qatar donated for reconstruction in Haiti during the UN Conference held for that purpose. We have undertaken similar search and rescue efforts in Indonesia and Pakistan, as well as other States.

But disaster relief cannot just be a number of well-meaning national initiatives. If too many ambulances rush to a catastrophe at the same time, there will be a traffic jam. This does not help those in need.

Instead, there must be a clear view of the immediate needs of the ground. There must be coordination. And the necessary skills and equipment must be deployed quickly in order to save lives.

Guidelines exist on the rapid deployment of military and civil defense assets: the so-called "Oslo guidelines" which are overseen by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). I salute the great work that the entire UN system, with its limited resources, is doing in difficult situations around the world.

My concern, however, is that these excellent procedures, which have been painstakingly worked out, cannot depend on advance official commitment of relief assets. Nor is there standardized, certified training for disaster relief staff around the world. This is a major handicap in turning plans into action.

So let me ask again: are we prepared?

In answer, let me say, that today I am proposing the establishment of a Humanitarian Operation Force, also known as HOPEFOR.

Such a force would draw on existing military and civil resources (material and human), to bring hope and emergency relief quickly and efficiently to the victims of natural disasters – staying long enough to close the so-called 'humanitarian gap'.

The HOPE Force would build on lessons learned from similar initiatives, like stand-by high-readiness humanitarian brigades, existing disaster relief forces, and other proposals that have been made to create a humanitarian rapid reaction force. I have asked IPI to help in this task.

I foresee that HOPEFOR would have a small, permanent headquarters to act as the nerve-centre for rapid deployment, to coordinate certified training, and to keep track of committed assets around the world which have been ear-marked for HOPEFOR's possible use. It would ensure sufficient regional coverage to provide well-equipped and well-trained rapid humanitarian deployment at short notice, anywhere in the world.

In response to a humanitarian crisis, HOPEFOR would establish a rapidly deployable field headquarters, augmented by regional experts, capable of assisting local area emergency management (together with national authorities). It would cooperate with civil society, NGO's and other humanitarian actors.

Because HOPEFOR is different, it must look and act differently. We must recognize that, when deployed in disaster relief, the military – due to its traditional role – is sometimes perceived as a threat by local inhabitants, or civil society, even though it has the best intentions.

HOPEFOR personnel would therefore have a distinctive colored helmet, beret, shoulder flash and vehicle marking to identify them as a visible force for good, and to insist an ethic of humanitarian assistance and pride in delivering hope – among those serving in HOPEFOR operations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I anticipate considerable support for this initiative. Indeed, a number of foreign ministers that I have spoken to about HOPEFOR are very enthusiastic. We shall continue with our consultations at this level in order to explore the possibility of creating HOPEFOR.

Certainly, we shall draw on the work of experts on this field.

Based on the opinions made in the consultations and the expert opinion, we shall present the ideas and opinions to a meeting along the side of the next session of the General Assembly of the UN to which we shall invite all member States , in an effort to carry out the idea

To work, HOPEFOR will require *participating States or organizations* that will commit to have their forces trained to the OCHA standards.

It will also require *contributing States* which make a firm advance commitment of deployable assets.

And it will have to be *sufficiently funded*.

By establishing a humanitarian operation force along these lines, I am confident that we will be in a better position to deliver hope and save lives after humanitarian disasters.

Thank you for your attention.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much, Prime Minister for those words, and I found particularly encouraging that apparently your assessment is that on the basis of conversation you've had with foreign ministers there is actually a political will to move forward on such a proposal, and, of course, it is extremely timely because of the tragic events in Haiti and we don't want similar things to happen once again. We need the international community to come in quickly and efficiently and this is the first understanding, the very purpose of your initiative. Before I open the floor, can I just ask you one question?

I understand that you will take the initiative to a meeting between a group of foreign ministers at the margins of the General Assembly and the idea as I understand it is to establish a task force at the foreign minister level to evaluate proposals which will be a bit developed. Is this a correct understanding?

Sheikh Al-Thani: Yes, I think it is very important from now until the General Assembly if we can do this preliminary study and, as I mentioned in my speech, I talk with a few friendly countries which are excited about the idea and, of course, we need a task force after that if this idea will go ahead that means we need, you know, not only the support of the UN but also a body to work inside the UN to execute this project. And for that a team of foreign ministers will be a very good idea.

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much. May I now open the floor. Can you please raise your hand and please state your name and your affiliation. Sir, you have the floor.

Hamid Al Bayati: Thank you very much. My name is Hamid Al Bayati. I am Ambassador of Iraq to the United Nations. Mr. Prime Minister, welcome to New York and this is a lovely initiative I think to add to other initiatives which were really big achievements for Qatar in the regional and international arena. A quick question: Is this force HOPEFOR going to be military and humanitarian because you mentioned it is going to be humanitarian to provide humanitarian aid during crises. Is it in addition to humanitarian support going to be a military force to maintain security after the disasters happen like what we saw in Haiti where there was some looting? And so is it a combined military and humanitarian force?

Sheikh Al-Thani: Well, as you know, we know that the United Nations force has the blue hat and I wish that this is my own, my country idea how we can do another color of hat for hope. I have no sensitivity about any kind of colors, but what I think this force their first task is how to help people in a professional way? How to bring the aid in a professional way? They need also many satellites in the world to be more quick and more professional and, as you know, everybody is willing to send. I remember in Haiti we had problems to send our planes because the coordination was bad. In the beginning I don't blame because there was the chaos happening and a lot of people dying and the city in ruins. So what we need is one body to take the initiative and everybody can call this body to facilitate how the aid reaches people? Is it going also to keep the order law and order or that is something has to be studied? But the main task is to go and to try to help people and to do hospitals in the scene site to try to reach them with the medication, with the food, with the cloth, they need shelters, you know all these kinds. And if there are mechanisms, how you will do this? I think that will be the idea which could make things more easy if it happens. I hope it doesn't happen but it will make it more easy for ...you know not all countries have the capabilities. And even no one country has the capabilities to help. You know with Haiti we needed everybody to come here, the United Nations including my country to support not only during the crisis but after the crisis. Thank you.

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much. I think this goes to the very heart of the matter namely the coordination question we saw it both in the aftermath of the tsunami and we saw it in Haiti. So that is my personal opinion here is that what we are talking about is predominantly a humanitarian force which is non military but which has a command of control system which can provide the necessary coordination to everybody. I saw several hands here so we'll start with the young lady over there.

Liz Yaslik: My name is Liz Yaslik from the CNN. Thank you very much for coming and my question kind of goes along with exactly what you were just talking about in Haiti, you saw a lot of relief planes not able to even take off. There was a plane full of pediatricians waiting to go down to Haiti and you saw a sort of miscommunication, they were sort of tied up in their paperwork, legal restrictions. I was wondering how we can hope to address this problem and also how would you communicate between different non-governmental organizations and different governments looking to go down to Haiti or the next natural disaster. How will you coordinate all these and bring

them together and say look we have a solution to get the most help there and the quickest.

Sheikh Al-Thani: You know I remember at the beginning of the crisis of Haiti I was watching the TV and I was receiving some phone calls because we were going to send already one of our planes thinking that it will be easy to land and we just we sent some doctors and some other people to help and 50 tons of medications, if I remember, at that time. And it was totally different because it was very difficult to land because there is no coordination not only because there is a governmental and non-governmental body. Who is in control? That's another problem and I think this force and this task it will be the coordinators between government and non-government aides or help in any crisis. I hope it doesn't happen but you know this could happen at any time. So in my opinion that will be one of the tasks for this force is to be the coordinator for any disaster.

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much. Would you please state your name and your affiliation Sir.

Riyad Mansour: My name is Riyad Mansour. I am the ambassador of Palestine to the United Nations. I want also to welcome you to New York. We are delighted to see you and to listen to your presentation, and these are very creative and positive ideas. I have only one question. And the question is related to the relationship between this force and OCHA with a view of avoiding redundancy because my understanding is that OCHA is supposed to be involved in many of these issues related to the emergency help when we have catastrophes whether they are national catastrophes or other form of catastrophes so what would be exactly the relationship between this idea and OCHA in terms of avoiding redundancy and not doing the same thing?

Sheikh Al-Thani: As you know, ambassador, OCHA is mainly to send reliefs and send things. What we are talking here is professional peoples to be trained in a professional way and their international standard for any kind of tasks. OCHA what it's doing, trying to collect things, trying to coordinate helps from each countries. You need to know what sort of, not language, but what sort of parameters you are dealing with in these things and is the people you are sending are helping or they need help when they reach there because sometimes these people which you send them is heavy burden for the country which receive them so you need to well-organize these. Is it going with, without, separate...this is we have to study it and we are in the first step in this so we have to study this matter. Thank you.

Khalid Al Nafisee : My name is Khalid Al Nafisee. I am the Ambassador for Saudi Arabia. Your Highness, welcome to New York and good to see you again. Not a question but a recommendation for the task force that's going to come out. In reality, you touched on a very important point which is logistics. I think most of the organizations in the United Nations they have a job but they don't know the meaning of logistic or not, they do it as best as they can. There are professionals who work with logistics and moving, most of them in the army and air force and things. These are people who know how to move things during the time of the disaster and coordinate it. Not the same person who is going to go medicate and take the food. So it is really one of the brightest things it could happen and concentrate on the logistics, the movement of anything that will be to the area of the disaster. Thank you.

Sheikh Al-Thani: I agree with you, Mr. Ambassador. I think this task force has to study how to bring everybody together both sides you need the logistics and you need the professional people but you need the people which they work after the logistics there with the doctors, the nurses, how you do things and you need sometimes engineering to set some places which they can live in during the crisis or a temporary headquarters, and this is very complicated and I think if we can do this unit, you know I don't want to dream more but I believe all the countries should participate financially in a very, as we all of us participate in the United Nations but not in the same but something to go for that because we never know how much we need and when we need and that will be something important and a big change and how we deal with these things quickly.

Rød-Larsen: Thank you. Then the gentleman with the handsome cane over there.

Mort Zuckerman: Welcome to the IPI. I am Mort Zuckerman, I'm the treasurer of the IPI. What you described, it seems to me, has a predicate which is to study the different kinds of disasters and find out what the problems were and what the needs are and this would be the basis on which to begin to assemble all of the different assets. Is that something that you think could get started fairly early without having to put together a whole group of different countries and this will be the outline.

Sheikh Al-Thani: No, we need...I agree with you we need a task force from different countries to do the study but before that we have to prepare the idea and the preliminary study. So from there we can take it and then they can say this is right, this is wrong, no we have to do it this way, not that way. The idea from this we will start the initiative, we start to do the studies, the preliminary studies hoping that the United Nations and the people will realize that this is something important and from there we take it.

Rød-Larsen: I think the prime minister will have to leave within 15 minutes so I think we will collect a few questions.

Byrganyim Aitimova: I am the ambassador of Kazakhstan to the United Nations. You are most welcome and this is a rare opportunity to see such a high-level person like you with such a new and substantive initiative. I have a very short question. Do you think that this task force group from ministers of foreign affairs which I like it very much and not on our level but on your level do you think that it is a fundraising issues will be in your picture in the framework of your task group, how do you think?

Sheikh Al-Thani: Well, I think when we are in the United Nations before that time we have to talk with few countries and try to bring them together from different continents and to try to tell them what our idea is to do a special session for this and invite everybody and we will be welcoming anyone who would like to participate in this task force because it is not belong to us it is just an idea we would like to study it maybe it works maybe it doesn't. But we believe in it. That's the main thing. Thank you.

Fedra Fateh: Your Excellency, my name is Fedra Fateh and my family is from Iran. I would like to commend your leadership on an issue of global importance. I just like to request that Qatar maintains its visible position on such important efforts that the world can continue to see a positive contribution coming from the Islamic world. I have worked primarily in the United States and in the West and sadly among the distinguished people you have here the consciousness is much more positive but unfortunately in the West the view of the Islamic world continues to be negative so I hope that Qatar will keep the spotlight on your country and you were the one who took the initiative. Thank You.

Sheikh Al-Thani: Well thank you very much. I think we have to work hard, we have to work really hard to try to bring everybody together. Everybody, his belief, principle is principle, what you believe, what I believe what the other believe we have to respect each others and work with each others. That is the problem which we have that everybody want to force his own belief on the others and we should stop doing this. We should work in different way. We should work in the international principle. Human relief is a human relief. Crisis is crisis. So we have to work on these issues and not to try to underestimate anybody. And my country, as you know, we are a small peaceful country. We have nothing to do. What we believe that we have to participate since we are a rich country. We have to participate in human rights and human beliefs especially in the humanitarian its side. So that's what we are doing.

Rød-Larsen: So many hands now that I can't possibly accommodate everybody within our time constraints. But I think we just know the one to the right from my point of view here. Go ahead please.

Patrick Hayford: Thank you very much. My name is Patrick Hayford from the office of the Special Advisor on Africa in the UN. Your Excellency, first I would like to join others in thanking you and congratulating you for this excellent initiative on such a critical area. I would just like to say that given all the sensitivities involved, this is focused on the UN because the UN enjoys its unique legitimacy and support from all constituencies. I think the more effective it will be. And then, Excellency, I would also like to say since I work on Africa, since many of the major humanitarian challenges today are focused on Africa, I trust and hope that the task force will have a very strong African representation so that the perspectives of that beautiful continent are fully reflected in the recommendations that come forward. Thank you.

Sheikh Al-Thani: I fully agree with you.

Unidentified Speaker: I salute the Prime Minister for his idea. It is true that when there is a catastrophe as it happened in Haiti all of us suddenly realized that there is a gap of global response for such a catastrophe. I think your idea is in line to sort of fill that gap. But then there is a need to insure that we build on what we already have and I think a number of UN agencies have somehow scattered the capacities which could be brought together and this initiative in order to be able to meet such an emergency as happened in Haiti. So your idea is welcome and we await the result of this inquiry and investigation and study. Final comment: I would like to salute Qatar for the leadership role it has played in working for a peaceful solution in the Sudan and also for working for a peaceful solution between Djibouti and Eritrea that is very commendable and please keep up that effort besides that peaceful solution to chronic global problems.

Sheikh Al-Thani: For your first comment I totally agree with you that there are a lot of pieces which have to come together that's what the study will show and that's where we need the task force after that. So the UN and the people representative in the UN of all countries should believe in how to bring that and to make it a strong force and thank you very much for your comment about Eritrea and Djibouti.

Murad Askarov: I am the ambassador of Uzbekistan. We welcome your initiative, and welcome you to New York. I have just two questions if this HOPE force will not have the UN umbrella, what kind of level of cooperation it will have with UN? And second question is if there is any geographical choices where headquarters will be located. Thank you.

Sheikh Al-Thani: It has to be the umbrella of United Nations and UN, and this is why I said when we do the study we'll go there and discuss it with the UN umbrella. Where the location, that's also for the experts to study. I think we need few satellites and the main things will be the UN but we need maybe few maybe one, I don't know, but this is we have to study it carefully and see what we need.

Hasan Kleib: My name is Hasan, Ambassador of Indonesia. And I welcome you, Prime Minister. Coming from a country which is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, having a very great interest in trying to mitigate any possible impact of any disaster, we commend and welcome your initiative. Indeed it would be better to prefer, of course we cannot prefer any disaster but we can reduce, mitigate but also...but judging from our experience in tsunami and earthquake we have already raised pertinent issue on first is coordination because assistance, international assistance are there, it's always coming in, the problem is coordination on the delivery and access to the one who needs. But also partnership among countries in the region as well as one issue that should be taken into account is the consent of the government concerned when there are lots of other foreigners coming in at the same time, not only coordination but also earlier consent of the government is also needed. So we did commend your initiative, if you call it HOPEFOR. A few years ago I heard about the White Helmet, they called it White Helmet, just a difference here between Blue Helmet and White Helmet, but the most important thing is this, indeed on the task force. Because we have to know, to explore, this development of the initiative on such kind of components, military, police, including civilians. And then, what is the rule of

engagement, and then which to whom come from the mandate, the mandate for those task force or those personnel to come into one country having a kind of mandate. Is it from the Council? Is it from the security region? But at least as my colleague here said about the relations between the task forces in the UN, it's very imperative. Thank you.

Sheikh Al-Thani: I think we have to wait for these questions until we finish the study. Second thing we saw in many places where we go, the things which we take, the people they don't want it they want something different, and that's where is the coordination come. Sometimes, they need something, maybe it cost you 1% of what you send, but because you don't know what they need, so you send sometimes the wrong things, and that's one of the things where it will be what is the umbrella, who will instruct them, how will they receive. This is not for us to decide, we will do the study then the UN have to decide how they will work it out. Can we take the last question?

Rød-Larsen: The last question goes to a man who's had his hand up for half an hour now.

Hassan Hamid:
Hassan Thank you Mr. Chairman. I am Minister Councilor Hassan from Sudan. First, of course, we would like to welcome wholeheartedly His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani and would like of course to welcome warmly this constructive dialogue today by Qatar which in our standing is quite in conformity with the role, leading role played by Qatar in different areas, in connection with maintaining peace and international security. Namely, in my country Sudan, where Qatar is playing instrumental role for making peace there. So my question will be, Your Excellency, your initiative is quite a productive one and if you could just highlight more on the expected relationship with the donor community regarding the issue of funding so as to secure the prompt response so how can we manage the sustainability of funding of this very, very good initiative. Thank you, Your Excellency.

Sheikh Al-Thani: Thank you. I think I mentioned that financial situation have to study all the countries all the countries which they can they are participating in any crisis and sometimes more than what they should need. So if we add some not in our participation with the UN, this is I'm sure it will cover, it will relieve the UN and the country when the things happen that this is ready and we already paid for it all of us we paid for it. That's very important in my opinion. Thank you very much, gentlemen. I'm very pleased.

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much, Mr. Prime Minister, and thank you all for coming I think it spells volume for the discipline in the UN community that there are no questions to the Prime Minister about the vote in the Security Council today. You stuck to the topic of the day.

Sheikh Al-Thani: Thank you very much. Thanks God that we are not in the Security Council. Thank you all.