May 28, 2015

I grew up in a Kurdish dairy-farming family in Eastern Turkey. Anatolia is a bridge between the East and the West and has a rich history that you see in the faces of its people. The hardworking, communal culture shaped me as a person.

In 1994, I came to New York to study English and later became drawn to the idea that anyone can start something in America - all you needed was a dream and the willingness to take a risk. The small farming towns in Upstate New York reminded me of Anatolia. The people, like the shepherds I grew up with, lived off the land and gave what they could. After a few years, I took a loan from the Small Business Administration, bought an old yogurt plant and brought a small group of us together to make the real, wholesome yogurt of my childhood. We called the company Chobani, “shepherd” in Turkish, to put the hardworking, giving spirit of farmers into the heart of the company.

From the start, I wanted Chobani to be committed to making better food for more people and to stand for something even bigger than the natural food we made. Since day one, we have given 10% of our profits to charity through the Chobani Foundation and stayed true to our mission to make food the right way, and make it available to all. Building Chobani, I found that the real power of entrepreneurship was the impact you can have on communities. Ultimately, Chobani’s journey proved that if you have the right mindset, the sky is the limit.

My story, like so many others, is only possible in America. The magic and power of the American dream is something I believe should be available to everyone - and is part of my hope for a modern Turkey and for entrepreneurs around the world.

In the decade since I started Chobani, dramatic changes have occurred around the world. One result has been a shocking increase in the number of people made homeless by conflict. Today, more than 50 million people - most of them women and children - are living as refugees or displaced people, robbed of life’s opportunities by war, persecution and natural disasters.

My new personal foundation - Tent - will be an integral part of my commitment to helping the world’s refugees. There are thousands of incredible, passionate people around the world working with refugees every day in organizations like UNHCR. Tent will be a vehicle for bringing support, providing partnerships and urgently needed assistance to refugees, and for building support for the policies that can help end this refugee crisis.
I have always planned to give most of what I had. Growing up, I watched my mother give to those who needed and it came from the most amazing place in her heart. She put a smile on people's faces and that always stayed with me.

Today, I dedicate my signing of the Giving Pledge to my mother and I am publicly committing the majority of my personal wealth - along with everything else I can do - to help refugees and help bring an end to this humanitarian crisis.

I believe that as people who have been blessed with opportunity in our own lives we must give hope to others.

I thank Bill Gates and Warren Buffett for providing the inspiration for this important commitment and hope that my commitment to the Giving Pledge will in turn inspire others to do the same.