

9 December 2016

71st session of the General Assembly

**Remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson,
International Human Rights Day 2016: “Stand Up for Someone’s Rights Today!”**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you to Hunter College and the UN Human Rights Office, for organizing this event.

Today is an important day for us all, as we mark the adoption sixty-eight years ago of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – an historic document that embodies the highest ideals to which we strive – a peaceful, just, free and equal world.

Today is also an occasion to reflect on our progress in achieving the principles of the Declaration, and to renew our commitment to achieving the ideals that it enshrines.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the adoption of the Declaration, great strides have been made across the world in the promotion and protection of human rights.

This notably includes the establishment of the United Nations’ Human rights Council in Geneva.

In a short period of time, the Human rights Council has contributed significantly to the promotion of human rights globally, and we here in New York must do all we can to support its important work.

Despite these accomplishments, however, far too many people live daily realities of violations and abuses, persecution and discrimination, and a denial of their basic rights and freedoms.

It is a situation that collectively – and individually – we must do more to address.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor”.

It is a mantra that we must all embody in our day-to-day lives.

At a time when xenophobia, hate and mistrust are on the rise across our world, the UN Human Rights Office’s global campaign “Stand up for someone’s rights today” could not be more timely.

It calls on all of us to stand up to injustice, harassment, bullying and discrimination, and not to be silenced by fear, apathy, or ‘bystander effect’.

And it recognizes that global change can come from individual acts of courage that protect the vulnerable, empower lives, and inspire movements.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The realization of human rights is not a race to the finish. It requires daily work to protect hard-won gains, and guard against backsliding.

To this end, I want to thank human rights defenders across the world. Their tireless work – often in dangerous circumstances – has led to many of the historic advances that we have achieved. And their continued work on the frontlines to protect the rights of our most vulnerable people is a service to humanity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides humanity with a universal masterplan to transform our world.

It is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and recognizes the fundamental importance of human rights to sustainable development.

As we move to implement the SDGs we must see them as tool to advance human rights globally, and to ensure that our most vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized people are not left behind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, I want to once again acknowledge the important role of civil society and academia in the advancement of human rights.

And I want to call on everyone here today – and across the world – to join me in pledging to stand up for others, to stand up to injustice, and to stand for human rights.

I thank you.