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71st Session of the General Assembly

Acceptance speech by H.E. Peter Thomson upon his election as President

Mr. President,
Secretary-General,

I thank you for your wise leadership and for the excellent example you have forever set us here at the United Nations. I look forward to working with you both over the next three months in preparation for the seventy-first session.

To my honourable colleague, Andreas Mavroyiannis, I thank you for the fairness of our contest and the gentlemanly conduct which you exhibited throughout. You would have been a credit to the General Assembly and the United Nations had that small majority tipped your way, rather than mine. I wish you well in all your future endeavours, and I thank you again.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the government of Fiji for putting me forward for this post. It is a great honour that they chose to put up one of their own for this high office and that that person was me. I would like to thank my Prime Minister, my Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Fiji's Ambassadors internationally, and especially the Permanent Mission of Fiji to the United Nations, the staff of the Permanent Mission, *vinaka vaka levu* to you all.

I would also like to take this moment to thank my brothers and sisters from the Pacific Small Islands Developing States (PSDIS). This was not just a Fiji candidacy, it was a PSIDS candidacy, and this is the first time in history that one of the Pacific SIDS countries has put forward a candidate who has succeeded to be elected as President of the General Assembly. It is a great moment for the Pacific Islands, and I thank you all for your support. The Pacific SIDS bring special perspectives on climate change and on oceans issues, and you can expect me to be vocal on these issues in the seventy-first session.

Let me say that while this is a SIDS and G-77 supported presidency, I want to assure everyone that it is a presidency for the whole house. We are bound together, not only by the UN Charter, but by the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which is a universal agenda. That is what lies ahead for us in the seventy-first session, the implementation of that Sustainable Development Agenda. That is the high purpose of the seventy-first session, to get momentum on that agenda. By the end of the seventy-first session we must be accountable. We must have progress on all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). That is going to require transforming systems. It is going to mean overcoming structural and intellectual barriers. We have to implement that agenda for it is there for the good of our children

and our grandchildren. Without it their future will be in jeopardy; with it they will have a sustainable place on this planet.

On a personal note, I would like to thank the two gentlemen who have been sitting beside me on the Fiji desk this morning. They are perhaps the two most senior diplomats Fiji has ever produced. Ambassador Satya Nandan was for many years the Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority and was an Under-Secretary-General here at the United Nations. Sitting next to him is Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, the President of Fiji until last year. Ratu Epeli and my father fought in the trenches of the Solomons Campaign of the Pacific War, and our families have been linked ever since. It is a great honour for me that he is with me here today. Ratu Epeli began his career here at the United Nations, as the First Secretary back in the early 1970s and rose to be Fiji's Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Tonight, we will sit down at the Fiji Mission, we will drink kava together and we will sing a lot of Pacific Islands songs. You are all welcome to come along and join us there, anybody who feels like it.

My wife, daughter and sister are sitting up there in the top seats. Thank you so much for being here. If you see the three of them and you know that my grandchildren are all girls, you will know why I am a "HeForShe" and why I stand for gender parity.

In conclusion, I pledge to serve the General Assembly of the United Nations at all times in a spirit of fidelity and commitment to the common good, always in accord with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

I thank you.