

15 December 2016

71st session of the General Assembly

**Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson,
on Culture of Peace; on Global Health and Foreign Policy**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Renowned poet Maya Angelou once said “Hate – it has caused a lot of problems in this world, but it has not solved one yet”.

It is a simple observation that goes to the heart of one of the most fundamental challenges the international community must address to build a culture of peace across our world.

Racism, xenophobia, intolerance, and other manifestations of hate, drive many of today’s conflicts, motivate violent extremism, and inspire acts of terrorism.

Hate often lies behind the persecution and targeting of ethnic and religious minorities, migrants and refugees, and other vulnerable and marginalized people.

And far too often, hate is used as a tool by leaders seeking, for their own gains, to exploit the insecurity of people, disunity of societies, and injustices of our world.

The scale of human suffering taking place around our world, the need to break the cycles of conflict, violence and disunity, and the call for us all to build sustainable peace, could not be clearer.

Fostering a culture of peace requires dedicated attention to the promotion of intercultural understanding, the strengthening of inter-religious dialogue, inspiring people’s hope for the future, and motivating them to unite for peace.

In this regard, I wish to commend the work that is being undertaken by UN agencies – including UNESCO and the UN Alliance of Civilizations – to promote non-violence and mutual understanding.

Their practical and innovative initiatives to promote peace education, raise awareness of cultural pluralism, and support peace and reconciliation processes, are invaluable.

Such targeted projects can have profound ramifications in helping to rebuild fragmented societies, and should be scaled-up and supported.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

Building long-term, sustainable peace requires comprehensive approaches that bring together peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development efforts.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a fundamental tool in this regard.

The SDGs are premised on the fundamental recognition of the importance of peace as an outcome in itself – through SDG16 – as well as a cross-cutting priority necessary for the achievement of all 17 SDGs.

This need to take a comprehensive approach to building peace was also recognized in the sustaining peace resolutions adopted earlier this year.

I am committed to deepening understanding at the UN, and amongst relevant global stakeholders of the importance of sustainable peace, and the mutually reinforcing interlinkages between implementing the 2030 Agenda and sustaining peace.

To this end, I will be convening a high-level informal dialogue on 24 January here at the UN on the subject of “Building Sustainable Peace for All: Synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace”.

I encourage you all to attend.

* * *

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

I would now like to briefly address the issue of ‘Global Health and Foreign Policy’.

The recent global breakouts of Ebola and the Zika virus demonstrated all too clearly how quickly global health crises can cross national borders, divert limited health resources, and wreak devastation on families, communities, and entire regions.

The impacts of global pandemics stretch far beyond the health sector.

They undermine socio-economic development, weaken social cohesion, and can ultimately threaten national and regional security.

The World Bank has estimated the annual global cost of ‘moderately severe to severe’ pandemics to be around USD\$570 billion, or 0.7 percent of global GDP.

Addressing global health is therefore not only a goal in itself of the 2030 Agenda, SDG3 is a cross-cutting precondition for achieving the rest of the SDGs, including building peaceful and inclusive societies.

In our efforts to address global health crises, a number of key steps must be pursued.

Firstly, we need to accelerate our pace of progress in fighting malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis, Ebola and other communicable and non-communicable diseases.

This includes by giving dedicated attention to addressing growing anti-microbial resistance.

Secondly, our responses to global health crises need to include specific mechanisms to ensure the particular needs of women and girls, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, are not overlooked.

And thirdly, as agreed earlier this year at the High-Level meetings on HIV and AIDS, and on Antimicrobial Resistance, we need to better coordinate international action, sustain political will, and ensure more predictable finance, to improve global capacities to deal with health crises.

Well-functioning and resilient national health systems that have the service delivery, finance, human resources, infrastructure, and information and supply management systems, to respond to the health needs of local and national populations are essential.

So too is achieving our ultimate aim of universal health coverage, in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

In closing, I want to recognize the efforts of the Global Health and Foreign Policy group, for bringing concerned attention to global health issues, including through the ‘Global Health and Foreign Policy resolution that is to be adopted today.

Given the extent to which global health emergencies can arise without notice, threaten our communities, undermine development, and even destroy our futures, it is self-evident that we must do all we can to safeguard our societies from their impact.

Thank you.