

23 September 2016

71st session of the General Assembly

**Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Meeting of Group of 77 + China Ambassadors**

Ambassador Plasai, Chair of the Group of 77 and China,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you all this morning and to have the opportunity to share with you, in an informal exchange, my vision of the work that lies ahead for the 71st Session of the General Assembly.

I thank Ambassador Plasai for hosting today's meeting, which follows on from last Friday's 40th Annual Ministerial meeting of the G77 and China, where I had the honour to address your ministers.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate the Republic of Ecuador for its election as the upcoming chair of the Group and look forward to cooperating with Ambassador Sevilla Borja as he and his team prepare for the work ahead.

I had the pleasure to preside over much of the High Level segment to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development last week – a meeting that reminds us of just how much work remains to be done before that right is realized for all.

Excellencies,

As we begin the 71st session of the General Assembly, it is clear that the United Nations is facing serious issues in tackling the global challenges of our time – implementing sustainable development; climate change; intractable conflicts; terrorism; violent extremism; the refugee and humanitarian crisis; contagious and non-communicable diseases; and the protection of human rights.

For the incoming Secretary-General, ensuring that the UN system is fit-for-purpose, and able to respond effectively, will be the key task at hand.

Over the coming weeks, as the Secretary-General selection process continues, I am committed to facilitating a smooth and credible conclusion to the process including by overseeing a dignified appointment process in the General Assembly. I will also support an effective transition for the Secretary-General designate once selected and provide ample opportunities for Member States to meet with her or him in interactive meetings in order to build a solid working relationship.

Excellencies,

During the 71st session, I will stand by the key overarching principles of the work of the Office of the President, including a commitment to ethics, transparency, inclusiveness and effectiveness, in line with the oath of office that I swore on taking office, and the code of conduct that I committed to adhering to.

In terms of my vision of the work that lies ahead for the General Assembly during the 71st session, I expect this will cover three key areas:

- Ensuring that the enthusiasm and momentum of last year’s adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the Paris Climate Agreement are not squandered, but rather directed towards concrete implementation;
- Addressing and responding to current global challenges; and
- Bringing forward the full agenda of mandated General Assembly processes.

As you all know, we have made the principle objective of the 71st Session, to drive a universal push for meaningful progress in implementation of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Our plan over the next eleven months is to progress implementation by sustaining global attention, building momentum, and establishing a solid foundation to support the dedicated work that will be needed to achieve the SDGs over the coming 13 years.

I know that many of you are interested in the details of our SDG Implementation Strategy and how we are going to achieve this, particularly with the limited resources of the Office, and the strictures of the President’s mandate.

I am being supported in this work by an experienced SDG implementation team within the Office of the PGA, led by Ambassador Williams of Grenada.

On this, I note that I have an office of 37 supporting me, of which 19 are women, and 21 are nationals of members of the Group of 77 and China.

In terms of the breakdown, 11 staff are UN employees, with six provided for by regular budget (two administrative assistants, three from the senior executive team and one senior advisor), and five covered through voluntary contributions to the OPGA Trust Fund.

One person is from the JPO programme and two are Interns.

There are five secondments from the UN system – UNICEF, World Bank, UNFPA, and UNDP; DPI in the Secretariat, and 18 secondments from Member States.

All funds received to support the work of the Office of the President are being deposited into the UN Trust Fund, where public scrutiny will be available for all sources of funding and expenditure. There is

no other account which I, or the Office, have access to. I take this opportunity to thank those who have provided funding, most of whom are represented in this room today.

The SDG implementation team is currently finalizing our SDG Strategy which will help guide how we drive action on each individual goal, and across all 17 SDGs.

Our SDG Strategy which is being finalized over coming weeks, we will focus on three key areas: 1) launching initiatives to drive action on a number of critical issues; 2) boosting activity in areas where action is already being undertaken; and 3) providing sustained engagement to support successful outcomes from existing SDG-related events and processes.

In all of this, we will of course be collaborating with Member States, the UN system, civil society, the private sector and other actors.

On the first key area of our strategy, of supporting existing SDG-related events and intergovernmental processes, I plan to provide sustained engagement to ensure successful outcomes of existing SDG-related processes, in order to strengthen their contributions to the achievement of the SDGs.

I will begin, for example, by attending and supporting a successful Habitat III Conference in Quito in October and following up on any matters that require attention and that come the way of the General Assembly.

Action on climate change is also, of course, essential to the SDGs, and I will continue to advocate for States to ratify the Paris Climate Agreement. I will attend the COP22 meeting in Morocco in November, and I am confident that we will see sufficient ratifications of the Agreement before this date, to enable its entry into force.

I will also work to foster better relations between Member States in support of ambitious outcomes across the second committee, within the QCPR process, and in Fifth committee discussions as they relate to financing UN system support for the SDGs.

I am also looking closely at the work of Member States aimed at aligning the agenda of the General Assembly with the 2030 Agenda and am discussing this matter with the President of ECOSOC, Ambassador Shava, as to how to accomplish this important task.

I intend to use all the tools available to me as President to bring this agenda forward on behalf of member States, including good-offices, public diplomacy, convening power, media outreach, and official trips. But I will also, of course, be relying on the support and cooperation of Member States, the UN system and other key partners to achieving our objectives. Here I look to the G77 for ongoing guidance as we proceed into the 71st session.

I have heard delegations' call for fewer High-Level Thematic Dialogues and Debates during the 71st Session, and I am committed to limiting the number of initiatives that we run to areas where the PGA's Office can bring a strategic focus to key implementation issues, and in a way that avoids overlap and duplication of others' efforts.

We are instead looking to make best use of existing opportunities including, where appropriate, by bringing an SDG lens to the large number of events that have already been mandated by the General Assembly for the 71st Session. This includes:

- Convening before the end of this year, a high-level panel meeting to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a General Assembly plenary meeting on the socioeconomic and environmental effects of the El Niño phenomenon, and a General Assembly plenary meeting to mark the 50th anniversary of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- On 21 March, convening a meeting, together with the President of the Human Rights Council, to commemorate International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – an issue that has taken on new resonance in these current times.;
- In May, convening a high-level event to mark the 10th anniversary of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in the margins of the Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues.

I will also consider how best to mark the 20th anniversary of the mandate of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

We are also currently looking at other opportunities during the 71st session where we can take advantage of the presence in New York of key interlocutors and stakeholders. This includes, for example Ministers and civil society in attendance during the Commission on the Status of Women.

On our second key area, of boosting activity around actions already being undertaken, we will look to complement, and lend support, where appropriate, to initiatives and processes led by partners within and outside the UN, and which can help to draw attention to the SDGs and drive SDG implementation.

Establishing strategic partnerships will also be a critical part of our SDG strategy, and we will look for opportunities to use the convening power of the Office to build on and support initiatives bringing together Governments, civil society, the private sector, foundations, academic institutions and other stakeholders, that can help advance the collaborative action that our SDG success depends on.

Our third area of our strategy, we will be launching a number of initiatives throughout the 71st session to drive action across a range of critical areas, such as education, finance and oceans.

We will begin with a global education campaign to raise awareness of the SDGs, in order to ensure every human sees them as their rights and responsibilities for realizing a sustainable world.

As part of this awareness-raising campaign, we will focus on ensuring that the message of the SDGs reaches and delivers for those left furthest behind, particularly for countries in special situations. We will also be stressing the interconnected nature of the SDGs and will encourage all sectors and stakeholders to work strategically and cooperatively together, in support of their achievement.

Fundamental to our efforts to promote understanding of the SDGs, will be a focus on education and working with young people, and as part of the campaign we will be pushing for the message of the SDGs to reach every classroom around the world, so that young people are empowered and feel ownership of the 2030 Agenda. I see young people as the main drivers of the sustainable development goals, given it is they who will inherit the world in 2030.

To achieve this universal education on the SDGs, we will work with the UN system, Governments, and other stakeholders.

During the 71st Session, we will also be working to ensure the success of the High-level UN Conference to support implementation of SDG 14 (on Oceans) from 5-9 June, including to ensure that it delivers a game-changing outcome that will reverse the cycle of decline in which our ocean is caught.

In the lead up to the Conference, we will be working to bring together experts and innovators, support diverse participation – particularly people from countries in special situations, and to ensure the Conference delivers the game-changing outcome needed. The establishment of new multi-sectoral strategic and operational partnerships, and an ambitious outcome document will be critical to the success of the Conference's objective.

We will also look to mobilize action from key players on financing the 2030 Agenda. This will include bringing together key stakeholders in order to push for a scaling up of financing, and implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, as well as to advocate for the transformative changes needed in the global financial system, to mobilize the necessary resources.

I will begin these efforts next week when I attend the annual UN-World Bank meeting, where I plan to raise this issue, and to start engaging in targeted and strategic outreach.

Excellencies,

The links between the 2030 Agenda and peace and security, and human rights are clearer than ever.

During the 71st session I will take forward implementation of the UN's 'sustaining peace' agenda, further to last April's landmark General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on the matter.

I will also take forward a range of mandated intergovernmental processes, including on:

- the participation of Indigenous peoples at the UN;
- a number of ongoing Law of the Sea-related matters; and
- the ongoing work on Security Council Reform, and the revitalization of the General Assembly.

I will also begin the process leading to the adoption of a global compact on refugees, and a global compact on migrants in 2018, by shortly appointing co-facilitators to take forward the migration consultations.

I am additionally committed to supporting Member States to bring a successful conclusion to the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism during the 71st session.

Excellencies,

This year, we began the High-Level Segment of the General Assembly with a moving SDG moment. It was designed to remind us of how transformative the SDGs will be, and how urgently action is required to implement them.

I have proposed that this practice continue each year as a mechanism to maintain the attention of Leaders on the SDGs as we progress towards 2030. As the excitement over the launching of the agreements subsides, the hard work of implementation takes over and it is vital that we apply ourselves 100 percent on our watch.

In terms of momentum, the 71st session will be critical for SDG implementation. In the midst of an already full General Assembly agenda, we must never lose focus on the fact that the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is our prime responsibility.

Achievement of the 17 SDGs will give our children and grandchildren the better world we wish for them.

I look forward to working with you in these efforts.