

13 September 2016

71st Session of the General Assembly

**Remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Prayer Service on the Opening of the 71st Session of the General Assembly**

Archbishop Wenski, Archbishop Auza, Reverend Fathers,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to join you all for this time of reflection.

This afternoon, I had the privilege of taking the oath of office as President of the 71st session of the General Assembly.

It was the first time that a President of the General Assembly has taken such an oath on assuming office, and it was indeed a moment of deep solemnity, leading me to accept with humility the heavy responsibilities now placed upon me.

It seems that every day our world is faced with ever more daunting challenges, and in the 21st Century, none exceeds that of Climate Change.

Inequality is widening, while people continue to suffer extreme poverty.

Conflicts rage. Xenophobia and hate seem to be on the rise all over the place.

Our environment is being pillaged and polluted, desertification spreading, sea levels rising and our beloved Ocean caught in a cycle of decline.

Each day we bear witness to the mass movement of desperate people, seeking refuge and solace, safety, and security. All too often they become pawns in political agendas, and the subjects of a hateful rhetoric that is increasingly becoming the norm.

In these troubled times many of our brothers and sisters feel anxious, powerless, and overwhelmed.

And so, it is that I say to you this evening, that it is particularly in testing times like these, that we must hold most fervently to our sense of charity, our faith and our hope.

There is nothing forlorn about hope. We have solid reasons to walk ahead in confidence that good will prevail.

Just this weekend, a cease-fire was agreed for Syria conflict. Let us pray all parties honor the terms of this commitment, so that lasting peace may come to the Syrian people.

In Colombia the world's longest running civil war has come to an end. Later this month I will go to Colombia to witness the formal signing of the peace agreement.

This time last year, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted at the United Nations. This agenda is one of greatest hope – it is humanity's masterplan for security and survival in a loving world. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change is making steady progress towards early ratification.

Through the 2030 Agenda's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, we have a universal integrated plan to end extreme poverty and hunger. Deliver health and education. Achieve gender equality. Manage sustainably our water and energy. Create economic opportunity. Reduce inequality. Save our Ocean's health and sustainably manage its resources. Tackle Climate Change. Ensure sustainable life on our lands. And promote peaceful and inclusive societies. In short, by the year 2030, we aim to transform our world for the good.

Over the course of the 71st General Assembly it will be my central purpose to ensure that meaningful progress is made in the delivery of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. I will be calling for all people of goodwill to work together towards the achievement of this common good.

Please join with me in spreading the message of the Sustainable Development Goals to every corner of our beautiful planet. The message is imbued with hope and faith and love for humankind and the world in which we live.

My granddaughters are with us here this evening. I ask that you become messengers of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda on behalf of their generation, and for all to come who will inherit the results of our deeds.

Thank you.