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71st Session of the General Assembly

Opening remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson International Day of Peace Student Observance Event

Excellencies,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Messengers of Peace and Goodwill Ambassadors,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

And even more importantly, all of you YOUNG PEOPLE gather here in the GA.

It is a great honor to be with all of you today – including those of you joining via videoconference – as we commemorate the International Day of Peace 2016.

Four days ago, I had the honor of taking the oath of office as the 71st President of the UN General Assembly.

It was a solemn occasion as this was the first time an oath of office had been taken on this very stage. But I asked my granddaughters – Grace, who is 7, and Mirabelle, who is 5 – to join me as I addressed the assembled dignitaries.

Having Grace and Mirabelle on stage was important to me, because I wanted to remind everyone in the audience that the future of this planet belongs to young people like them, and like you.

I wanted people to contemplate, that the decisions we take today will impact the people and planetary conditions of tomorrow.

But of course, the wonderful thing about young people is that you are not a passive or silent mass, you are not just waiting for the future to be delivered unto you.

No – you are dynamic individuals, you are a massive and diverse group of individuals with human rights, new ideas and unique voices. You can all make meaningful contributions to improve our world.

Therefore, I say to you today:

Do not limit yourself in addressing our common challenges or think that one person cannot change the world.

Remember, Malala was once just a teenage girl in remote Pakistan trying to get an education. But through her courage, commitment, and her advocacy for a girls' right to education, she has helped to change the world.

Each and every day, each and every one of you, through your actions can help to bring peace to a person, to a community, and to the world.

The Sustainable Development Goals are important vehicle for driving the positive change we need to see in this world.

Every young person should study these goals for they are the key to a secure future for the world.

If effectively implemented, they have the potential to transform our world from insecurity to peace; from disparity to equality; from need to prosperity; and from environmental degradation to sustainability.

This is why I have chosen as the key objective for my Presidency a universal push for meaningful progress in implementing the goals.

Obviously, I cannot do this on my own, and the UN can't do it on its own.

Thus, I am asking all of you to help me in spreading the word on the SDGs. Every human being must see the SDGs as their rights and responsibilities.

I congratulate you on the vibrant and colorful videos that you have made. They will help to spread the message of the SDGs, around the globe.

It is vital that these messages reach all corners of our world.

Thank you.