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71st session of the General Assembly

Briefing to Member States by H.E. Peter Thomson, SDG Implementation Strategy

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

When the historic 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all 193 Member States on 25 September 2015, it was done so with the purpose of transforming our world – eradicating poverty and fostering shared prosperity; tackling inequalities; advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; making the world safer and more just; and combating climate change and protecting our natural environment.

It was grounded in the principle of ‘leaving no-one behind’; ensuring human rights for all, and engaging young people.

The 2030 Agenda presents the world with what I have termed a ‘masterplan for humanity’ to achieve a sustainable way of life on this planet.

For this reason, when taking my Oath of Office, I made a firm commitment to push for meaningful progress in the implementation of each of the 2030 Agenda’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals during the session.

This commitment is rooted in my deep belief that only through the attainment of sustainable development will sustainable peace and human rights be realized for all. And that in turn, sustainable development will only be achieved by sustaining peace and the full realization of human rights.

Under the theme “The Sustainable Development Goals: A Universal Push to Transform our World”, I am striving to strengthen momentum for SDG implementation, and I am calling upon all actors – globally, regionally, nationally and at community levels – to view our world through the lens of sustainability, human dignity and equity.

To assist me in this, I have appointed an SDG implementation team within my Office.

This team is led by Special Adviser Ambassador Dessima Williams, and is comprised of experts from the UN Secretariat, and through secondees from UNDP, World Bank Group, UNFPA, UNICEF and Member States.

Expert assistance and global advocacy is also being provided through my appointment of Ambassador Macharia Kamau as Special Envoy on SDG Implementation and Climate Change.

Distinguished Delegates

Central to the remit of the SDG implementation team is my directive for it to form action alliances with key partners from all relevant sectors.

Based on the analysis which led to the adoption of the SDGs, I will focus my energies, and that of my team, on three tracks:

- Track One – Raising the global public’s awareness of the importance of SDG implementation;
- Track Two – Strengthening momentum in the implementation of each of the 17 SDGs; and
- Track Three – Supporting the UN and related agencies in making their maximum contribution to SDG implementation at all levels.

While it is Governments that have the primary responsibility for meeting the 2030 Agenda, the UN has a central role in support of implementation.

Part of that role is to activate and align all relevant partners in the universal and integrated pursuit of the SDGs – international financial institutions, multilateral bodies, regulatory authorities, the private sector, philanthropic foundations, civil society, women’s organizations, academia, local authorities and people everywhere.

My team and I will be specifically looking to work with those actors with the greatest multiplier effect for the implementation of the SDGs, and the greatest potential to mobilize the public.

Dedicated workshops, meetings, and events, at both expert and high levels, will be organized throughout the session.

Attention will also be given to regional balance and gender equality throughout the process.

The principles to be applied in delivering on this strategy will be in line with my Oath of Office, and will include transparency, inclusiveness, impartiality, effectiveness, and accountability.

Referring to the three tracks upon which we will be focusing our energy, you will recall that the first track is ‘Raising the global public’s awareness of the critical importance of SDG implementation’

The SDGs can only be successfully implemented if the global public is fully aware of the commitments made by their Governments; if they see the SDGs as both rights and responsibilities; and if individuals and societies accept the SDGs as the best path towards attaining sustainability.

To create greater awareness:

My team and I will promote the inclusion of the SDGs on the school curricula of every country in the world by reaching out to national governments and working hand-in-hand with the UNICEF's 'World's Largest Lesson' initiative.

In this regard, I will be writing to all Heads of Government, requesting their commitment to include the SDGs within your educational systems.

We will maximize the impact of online communication to reach a new global audience with the transformative message of the SDGs, in partnership with the Secretary-General's office, UN Agencies, the UN Secretariat's Department of Public Information, and SDG Advocates.

We will work with the SDG youth advocates to engage youth activists in communities around the world. We will support the ECOSOC Youth Forum next year in close collaboration with the President of ECOSOC, and together with the SG's Envoy on Youth, and the UN system, we will work directly with young leaders and entrepreneurs as SDG advocates.

And we will raise awareness of SDG implementation through high-level advocacy in events and workshops around the world, and by engaging both traditional and social media in order to bring new stakeholders into the SDG movement.

The second track of the OPGA's strategy is 'Strengthening momentum in the implementation of each of the 17 SDGs'.

The SDGs are universal, integrated and indivisible, and as such, progress on one goal is directly linked to progress on other goals. Indeed, implemented effectively, they will help to realize the human rights of all, as well as gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They also recognize the specific challenges that vulnerable countries face in pursuing implementation.

We will therefore endeavor to mobilize early action on each of the 17 SDGs along the following lines:

SDG 1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere: We will highlight innovative solutions to poverty eradication through dedicated SDG Implementation Assemblies across the world, in partnership with regional commissions and the UN Development System. We will also engage with Governments, donors, multilateral agencies and philanthropists to foster greater commitment to providing resources for poverty eradication.

SDG 2 End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture: We will push for increased investment, trade and social protection to support implementation, in collaboration with key UN partners such as the Zero Hunger Challenge and the Rome based agencies. We will be open to collaborative organization of meetings and events on SDG 2 targets.

SDG 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages: We will bring key partners together in the margins of the Commission on Population and Development in April 2017 on the theme “Changing population age structures and sustainable development”.

We will also focus on NCDs and follow-up on the high-level meeting on Anti-Microbial Resistance held at the outset of the 71st session and promote ways to strengthen the global capacity to tackle global health crisis.

SDG 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all: In collaboration with the World Bank Group, UNESCO, UNICEF, the Commission on Financing Global Education and others, we will push for fresh impetus behind the drive for universal access to quality education, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development.

SDG 5 Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls: We will convene key actors with a view to creating sustained engagement on areas of critical importance to achieving SDG 5, including in the margins of the 2017 Commission on Status of Women on “Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work”, as well pursuing other opportunities throughout the year.

SDG 6 Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all: We will unite key partners for progress around transformative water-use and sanitation technologies that will increase access to: safe and affordable drinking water; toilets; and adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene. This will include through the outcomes of the World Water Summit to be held in Budapest this month. We will also support World Toilet Day and similar initiatives.

SDG 7 Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all: We will seek commitments from key actors to substantially increase energy efficiency and the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix, while also pushing for access to modern energy for all. This includes commitments from those attending the World Future Energy Summit and IRENA, in Abu Dhabi in January 2017.

SDG 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all: We will convene leading thinkers and academics to identify which strategies will support major employment gains over the coming 15 years, in collaboration with UNCTAD, UNIDO, the ILO, and private sector actors.

SDG 9 Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation: We will engage actively with the Global Infrastructure Forum, to be held in April 2017. We will advance commitments to action in the area of sustainable infrastructure, and strategies to promote inclusive and transformational industrialization, through advocacy at the UN Conference on Transport in Turkmenistan, and the UNIDO 50th Anniversary Assembly, later this month as well as through collaboration with UNCTAD, UNDP, UNIDO and others.

SDG 10 Reduce inequality within and among countries: We will convene a dedicated meeting on tackling inequalities prior to the World Bank spring meetings in 2017, with a particular focus on social,

economic and political inclusion, in collaboration with the Commission on Business and Sustainable Development and others. We will also convene a High-Level Panel to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, in December 2016.

SDG 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable: We will push for implementation of the New Urban Agenda through the convening of a high-level debate towards the end of the 71st session, as mandated by the Habitat III Conference outcome document. We will also invite mayors, community administrators and city resilience leaders, as well as other relevant actors, to a dedicated meeting at UN headquarters on SDG implementation.

SDG 12 Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns: We will advance targeted areas where transformational change is possible through more sustainable consumption and production patterns, in cooperation with initiatives such as the UN Global Compact and other key actors. We will also take all measures possible to reduce the environmental footprint of the OPGA's office, including through carbon offsets and in support of 'Greening the Blue'. We will utilize the OPGA's communication capacity to stress responsible consumption patterns.

SDG 13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts: We will maintain the momentum for ratification of the Paris Agreement, including through active participation in the COP22 in Marrakesh next week. We will continue to push for ambitious engagement on climate action, including adaptation, mitigation, resilience, and disaster risk reduction, by all actors and through collaboration with UNFCCC. In line with this commitment, last week I convened a mandated plenary meeting of the GA on El-Niño.

SDG 14 Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development: We will ensure that the outcomes of the Oceans conference, to be held in New York in June 2017, deliver the necessary partnerships, programmes, commitments and call to action, to reverse the cycle of decline in which the Ocean is currently caught.

SDG 15 Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss: We will support the implementation of the Convention on Biodiversity, and establish means to advance of the objectives of the UN Forum on Forests in May 2017. We will also explore initiatives to ensure synergies between the Rio Conventions and the 2030 Agenda, including through action on land degradation and desertification.

SDG 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels: We will support initiatives related to peaceful, inclusive and just societies, including on rule of law, access to justice and effective, accountable and transparent institutions, through enhanced cooperation and engagement with key partners. We will also convene an informal meeting of the General Assembly in January 2017 to explore how best to develop the links between the 2030 Agenda and the Sustaining Peace agenda, and to promote UN system-wide coherence in addressing them.

SDG 17 Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development: We will engage partners where opportunities arise across all aspects of Goal 17 on finance, technology, capacity building, trade, and systemic issues.

We will focus these efforts in the following areas:

- First, aligning increased private investments and capital flows with the SDGs, including through “greening” the financial system and its regulatory mechanisms;
- Second, strengthening domestic resource mobilization capacity;
- Third, convening a joint meeting with ECOSOC on global economic governance;
- Fourth, mobilizing young innovators including on the margins of the ECOSOC Forum on Science Technology and innovation;
- Fifth, foster further work on South-South and Triangular cooperation, and
- Finally, sixth, collaborating with partners in the margins of the UN Statistical Commission, on how concrete and targeted assistance can help countries improve their data-systems and overall capacity in this area.

The final track of our overall SDG implementation strategy, track three, is supporting the UN and related agencies in making their maximum contribution to SDG implementation at all levels.

The UN system will play a crucial role in SDG implementation, both on the ground, and through dedicated follow-up processes at the global level.

To do so, the UN system must adjust to the scale and integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda, by improving its ability to both meet the expectations of Member States and engage with other actors to maximize its impact.

In support of this:

- My office will convene briefings between the new Secretary-General, members of the UN Chief Executive Board, and Member States, with a view to strengthening the UN system’s response to the SDGs, in tandem with the QCPR process.
- We will maximize the relevance and positive role of the General Assembly on SDG implementation, by appointing co-facilitators to take forward the process of re-aligning the agenda of the General Assembly with the 2030 Agenda.
- And we will strengthen the UN’s ability to engage with civil society, the private sector, and other relevant actors on SDG implementation, by improving current frameworks for engagement.

Distinguished Delegates,

My vision for the work that my team and I will undertake during the 71st Session, and the choice of strategic actions, priorities and events to be put in place, is intended to create meaningful momentum in implementing each of the 17 SDGs.

I hold myself accountable to this strategic plan.

At the High-Level Political Forum in July 2017, I intend to report on the progress we have witnessed, and that we have fostered, in implementing the SDGs during the 71st session.

To this end, I welcome cooperation, partnership and positive input towards the fulfillment of this strategic plan, by and from all those who believe in the need for real momentum to be achieved for the Sustainable Development Goals.

A universal effort is required if our world is indeed to be transformed towards a sustainable future for humankind.

I thank you.