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Address by His Excellency
the Prime Minister of the Portuguese Republic

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Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by expressing Portugal's condolences and solidarity to the people and government of Mexico for yesterday's violent tragedy.

I wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election. I welcome the priorities that you have established. Portugal fully supports an agenda centred on people and on the right that we all have to live a dignified life, in peace, on a sustainable planet. I also wish to express a word of appreciation to your predecessor, whose dedication and successes we most readily acknowledge.

Mr. Secretary-General,

I feel deeply moved to address today the "Peoples' Assembly" in the presence of the first Portuguese Secretary-General of the United Nations. Before you I solemnly pledge Portugal's commitment to the United Nations and multilateralism, founded on the primacy of International Law and the principles and values of the Charter.

Your priorities, Mr. Secretary General, are the same as ours: an organization that is stronger, offers greater solidarity and is capable of preventing conflicts, alleviating human suffering and promoting peace and prosperity. A more transparent United Nations, more effective, and more adaptable to a constantly changing world. We welcome and support the dynamism that you have shown right from the start of your mandate in reforming the United Nations System so that it may better fulfil its noble purpose. Only the United Nations holds a universal vocation to respond, in concert with Member States, to the increasingly complex challenges of our time.

Mr. Secretary-General,

Reforming the architecture of peace and security is an absolute priority. Consolidating a culture of conflict prevention requires action across the board and an integrated vision of the three pillars of the United Nations system - peace, human rights and sustainable development - as well as closer institutional cooperation between the organs of the Charter, namely the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Achieving sustainable peace will require greater synergies in the Organization's structures and missions on the ground. The ongoing efforts should also give fresh impetus to the reform of the Security Council to ensure a better representation of today's world. The African continent cannot be denied a permanent presence, and Brazil and India are also two inescapable examples. On the other hand, the complexity of the global problems we face requires us to foster partnerships, involving not only States, but also civil societies, international financial institutions, public and private entities.

I recall in this regard the General Assembly Resolution on cooperation between the United Nations and the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, adopted a few days ago, which aims to strengthen the complementarities between the two Organizations. I would also like to underscore the importance of the Portuguese language, which is today an instrument of communication with a global dimension. By the middle of this century, the Portuguese language should reach almost 400 million speakers. This is what justified its adoption as an official language in several international organizations. The acceptance of Portuguese as one of the official languages of the United Nations remains a common design of the Member States of the CPLP.

Mr. President,

The Secretary General has elected diplomacy for peace as one of the main flags of his mandate. This idea must guide us when we react, as international community, to the conflicts and crises that regrettably occur today in various parts of the world. The unity and firmness of the international community, embodied in the United Nations, in defense of the law and in the promotion of security and stability, is what enables us to move towards a fairer international order, and to find the best answers to the serious crises we face today, from North Korean threats to the situation in Syria, from the instability in Libya to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and so many other sources of confrontation, security risk or humanitarian drama.

A global threat that challenges us all is terrorism. Portugal strongly and unequivocally condemns all terrorist acts; underlines the importance of preventing and fighting radicalization, violent extremism and recruitment; and actively participates in the struggle against terrorism, notably within the framework of the Global Coalition against ISIS. We welcome the military successes achieved in Iraq over the past year.

Promoting peace and security goes hand in hand with promoting development. The two dimensions are complementary and strengthen each other. For this reason, diplomatic mediation efforts and peace operations in conflict zones also require humanitarian support, development cooperation and institutional capacity building for affected populations and States.

One of the clearest priorities of Portuguese foreign policy is the participation in Peacekeeping Operations and institution building within the framework of the United Nations. As a European and Atlantic country, with deep historical and cultural links to Africa, Portugal pays particular attention to partnerships between the two continents.

The first Summit between Europe and Africa took place in 2000, under the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union. The fifth European Union-African Union Summit to be held in Abidjan next November will be an excellent opportunity to better define the priorities of the Strategic Partnership between the European Union and Africa. The chosen theme, Youth, allows a much needed integrated approach which addresses issues of education and employment, demographic dynamics and economic growth, gender equality and civic participation.

The African continent has made important progress in recent years. We welcome the strengthening of cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union. There are many signs of hope, both politically and economically. The successful implementation of Agenda 2030 will be another important step.

However, numerous disturbances still need to be overcome. Portugal strives to do its part. First, through participation in various Peacekeeping and Stabilization Operations, within the framework of the United Nations and the European Union. We have reinforced our presence, without ever restricting the use of our troops, in the multilateral missions in the Sahel and Central Africa region, namely MINUSMA in Mali and MINUSCA in the Central African Republic. Secondly, through cooperation with many African partners in promoting maritime security, in particular in the Gulf of Guinea, to combat piracy and trafficking in people, drugs and weapons, to protect international trade, as well as from a strategic point of view, both for Africa and Europe.

Mr. President,

Peace and sustainable development are built on respect for the rights and dignity of the human person.

Portugal defends a Human Rights diplomacy. For us, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are inseparable and interdependent. They apply universally and do not depend on place, history, or the religious or civilizational matrix of each society. Upholding these rights is a task for all us, requiring dialogue and concerted action. Our mandate at the Human Rights Council, which ends this year, was guided by these principles and they will continue to guide us in the future.

In 2017, we celebrate 150 years of the abolition of the death penalty in Portugal. We have been pioneers in this cause and will continue to stand for the universal abolition of capital punishment.

The situation of migrants and refugees remains on the agenda. We have a moral obligation to protect and promote the rights of those who, like so many others before them, are forced to leave their homes and families in search of security and a better future. This is the principle that should serve as the basis for the Global Compact, which we pledged last year, to prepare and approve.

I underline, in this context, the work of the Global Platform for Support to Syrian Students, an initiative of the former President of Portugal, Jorge Sampaio. This is to guarantee the access to higher education for those young Syrians who, because of the conflict in their country, have been deprived of this universal right. I invite all countries that have not yet done so to join the Platform and support the Rapid Response Mechanism for Higher Education.

Mr. President,

For peace and development to be truly sustainable, we must show respect for our common home and for future generations. To protect and to preserve the planet is to nurture peace and prevent potential new conflicts caused by competition in access to diminishing resources.

In this regard, the Paris Agreement is a milestone in reducing the impacts of climate change. We cannot do without this universal instrument if we are to achieve the objectives of the environmental pillar of Agenda 2030.

Portugal will comply with the European Union's voluntary commitment to reduce 40% of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, and will contribute to the Green Climate Fund meant to help developing countries to adapt to climate change.

Agenda 2030 – the Sustainable Development Objectives – is the most powerful statement of our multilateral commitment to the rights of people, the quality of life of populations and the future of our planet. Portugal stands for these goals, which guide us both in our domestic policy and in our foreign and cooperation efforts.

All 17 Goals are very important to us. But we believe that, because of our history and the international action on the preservation and enhancement of marine resources, the Oceans' goal is one in which we believe our participation can bring greater added-value within the framework of the United Nations.

Source of life, knowledge, of so many resources and exchanges, the Oceans, which occupy 71% of the surface of our planet, are a top priority in any strategy for sustainable development. The need for action is pressing and wide-ranging, as was evident a week ago in Lisbon, in another "Meeting of the Oceans", which Portugal promoted, with the participation of dozens of countries, and which was this year dedicated to the theme "The Ocean and Human Health".

The first United Nations Conference dedicated to conservation and sustainable exploitation of the oceans. It was a privilege for Portugal to participate in the preparatory process for the Conference, as co-facilitator, along with Singapore, of the political document that resulted from it, "Our Ocean,

Our Future: Call For Action". I reiterate here my country's willingness to host the follow-up Conference in 2020.

In our view, the sustainability of the oceans requires a strengthening of their governance. For this reason, we believe that the General Assembly should formally decide on the beginning of the negotiations, starting in 2018, of a new legally binding instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas Beyond the Limits of National Jurisdiction.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Mr. President,

However varied the challenges we face today, however serious the risks and threats that afflict us, we are certain to make progress when we have clear goals and know how to establish partnerships to reach them. Multilateralism is the only framework for the defense of the common good of humanity and the collective promotion of peace, security and development. In no way does it diminish the sovereignty of each nation, nor the capacity for decision of their people and institutions. But the fraternal cooperation promoted by multilateralism adds to our own strength the strength of those who follow the same path.

This is the way of the United Nations; the direction is the agenda of the United Nations. Diplomacy for Peace, Diplomacy for Human Rights, the Climate Agenda, the Agenda 2030. My country is part and contributes to all of them. For the sake of humanity, which is our common condition.

Thank you very much.