

General Debate of the 71st session of the UN General Assembly

26 September 2016, General Assembly Hall

Closing statement by H.E. Mr Peter Thomson,

President of the 71st session of the General Assembly

Honorable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson, who is today participating in the signing of the Colombian Peace Deal in Cartagena, Colombia today.

Excellencies, the General Debate of the UN General Assembly provides us with a portrait of the current state of our world, painted for us by the Heads of State, Heads of Government and Ministers of our members.

Over the past 6 days, we have heard from members of this Assembly – about your priorities and your concerns as well as your hopes for peace, human rights and sustainable development.

Leaders recalled and reaffirmed the spirit and the principles of the UN Charter and confirmed their faith in the central role of UN in international cooperation.

They also addressed many of today's critical global issues.

In line with the theme of the 71st session, many leaders expressed their commitment to implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We began with a moving SDG moment which reminded us of how transformative the SDGs will be and how urgently action is now required to implement them.

I am greatly encouraged by the fact that so many Member States have already embedded the SDGs into their plans and policies. The task at hand is implementation of the SDGs, and I was encouraged by the many side-events last week that emphasised this need for action.

Wednesday's parallel meeting on Anti-Microbial Resistance stressed the urgent need for a global response to address this critical issue, the impact of which threatens millions of lives and progress across the SDGs.

I reiterate my call to Member States to see the SDGs included on the education curricula of every country around the world. It is the youth of the world who must know the SDGs in all their universal and integrated dimensions since they will be the inheritors of the 2030 Agenda.

Action on climate change is, of course, essential. I congratulate the UN Secretary General for the success of his Paris Agreement ratification ceremony last week. I note that we now need ratifications covering only a further 7.5% of global emissions to see the Agreement enter into force.

I am confident we will see this happen prior to COP22 in Morocco. I urge all members not just to ratify the agreement promptly, but to scale up the level of ambition in reducing emissions in order to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, and to mobilize the climate finance required to support vulnerable countries like Small Island Developing States and others.

Looking ahead, I am glad that many leaders identified the forthcoming Habitat III conference in Ecuador, and the SDG 14 Conference on Oceans which takes place in June 2017, as additional major opportunities to drive SDG implementation.

The plight of refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants right across our world was a focus of last week's deliberations, with the adoption of the New York Declaration at last Monday's Summit being an important step forward. The Summit has set in train a process that I will take forward during this session with a view to adopting two global compacts on migrants and on refugees in 2018.

The current global humanitarian and refugee crisis has its roots in a number of ongoing conflicts in our world, and has been exacerbated by the impacts of climate change.

I joined the Secretary General and Member States in condemning the unacceptable attacks on a UN aid convoy in Aleppo and in calling for a renewed effort from global and regional powers to find a peaceful political solution.

Many Member States called for a resumption of the Middle East Peace Process, in order to find a lasting solution. They also stressed the need to solve other conflicts and to address the spread of violent extremism and terrorism.

In relation to the UN's own capacities in maintaining international peace and security, many recalled the historic endorsement by the General Assembly and the Security

Council of the concept of sustaining peace; while several Member States referenced the importance of women's participation in peace processes, and of implementing commitments following the 2015 review of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

Numerous interventions stressed the pressing need for reform of the Security Council, while many others highlighted the critical importance of advancing disarmament. Those calls will no doubt be echoed in today's high level plenary meeting to commemorate and promote the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

In the area of human rights, Member States renewed their call for the promotion and protection of all human rights, and for dedicated efforts towards the empowerment of women and girls. Member States emphasised the inter-relationship between human rights, peace and sustainable development. Such linkages were also highlighted in the context of last Thursday's High Level Meeting commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development. Some members also recalled the challenges relating to intolerance and xenophobia and the continued need to tackle all forms of discrimination.

Excellencies, last week we witnessed the final address at a General Debate from UN Secretary General Ban ki-Moon. His statement was a testimony both to the work he has done these past 9 years and the scale of the challenges his successor will face.

The selection and appointment of that successor was addressed by almost every Member States.

This is a matter that I will manage with great care over the coming months, in line with the principles of transparency and accountability and with a view to ensuring a smooth transition.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is but a synopsis of the many issues raised these past 6 days.

Your engagement, and that of the many stakeholders that joined us this week, demonstrates once again the unique nature of the General Debate.

It is the embodiment of the equality of nations and provides Member States with an opportunity to advance our collective pursuit of solutions to global challenges through dialogue and cooperation.

At the same time, I am concerned that the standard of decorum during the General Debate appears to be slipping – with high levels of noise in the Hall and its surrounds; with the allocated speaking time often ignored; with low attendance by delegations as the Debate progresses; and with the proliferation of mandated and other events happening simultaneously to the General Debate.

I will therefore encourage the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the work of the UN General Assembly to consider this matter during the 71st session.

Excellencies, to conclude, let me express my sincere appreciation to all of the staff of the United Nations – to DGACM, the interpreters, security officers, protocol, maintenance staff and others – for their professionalism throughout.

Allow me to thank Member States for their kind words of personal congratulations and support.

I look forward to representing you all to the best of my ability during the 71st session.

I thank you.