

7 October 2015

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
at the High Level Presentation of the Nelson Mandela Rules**

Ambassador Oh Joon, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning.

Let me begin by extending my thanks to the Permanent Mission of South Africa and to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime for the invitation to today's event.

The UN Revised Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners – the “Nelson Mandela Rules” – convey a simple but profound message: prisoners are human beings, born in dignity and entitled to security and to the protection of their human rights.

As Mandela himself reminded us:

“It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.”

Too often, in the past, our nations have failed to protect the human rights of prisoners. Too often, the driving principle behind prisoner treatment has been to see these individuals as entirely separate from our communities and our societies. Hidden from our gaze, and indeed sometimes before our very eyes, prisoners have suffered abuse and mistreatment.

After five years of consultations and negotiations, today we stand on the threshold of a shift away from such an outlook and a move towards a new standard for prison administration.

The Mandela Rules contain crucial revisions to the 60-year-old international standards on treatment of prisoners. They confirm that all prisoners are to be treated with respect; that no prisoner shall be subjected to, and all prisoners shall be protected from, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

They outline that there shall be no discrimination; that the religious beliefs and moral precepts of prisoners shall be respected; and that legal representation and protection are mandated in regard to vulnerable groups within the prison populations.

They also go beyond rules relating to the protection of rights, per se: Among many other key advances, they call for the establishment of processes to address allegations of torture,

as well as for the provision of health and medical services. The rules also highlight the importance of social re-integration of prisoners – an approach which can help address associated inequalities. Furthermore, it is important to note also that the rules are to be complemented by the requirement that staff receive the necessary training to ensure the respect for human rights and to apply these rules.

The crucial challenge for member states will be to translate these rules into a reality and to increase cooperation both within and outside the UN system to improve the lives of prisoners throughout the world.

The active participation of Member States, intergovernmental organizations, civil society groups and independent experts and consultants, was essential in arriving at this juncture and I wish to recognize their contribution and commitment. The General Assembly has also played a pivotal role in bringing the world to this point. Now, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and the Economic and Social Council have recommended the adoption of the Nelson Mandela Rules by the General Assembly this year. I look forward to seeing the General Assembly take action on this in the very near future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the heart of the 2030 agenda agreed less than two weeks ago is a commitment to justice, rule of law and human rights. By focusing on prisoner rights, implementation of the Nelson Mandela Rules will help create prison systems that are consistent in their respect for the treatment of prisoners, and in so-doing, begin the march towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Thank you.