

12 October 2015

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
At the high level Panel Discussion on “Role of Regional and Sub-regional
Organizations in achieving Regional Integration: the Continental Free
Trade Area within the context of the first 10-year Implementation Plan of
Agenda 2063”**

Your Excellency, Secretary-General, Under Secretary-General Abdelaziz,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is an honor to participate in this High Level Panel discussion in the context of Africa Week 2015.

I would like to thank Mr. Maged Abdelaziz and other stakeholders for organising today's discussion. I commend your commitment and dedication to enhancing the partnership between the UN and Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen, the events of 2015 offer an unprecedented opportunity for Africa to reduce poverty, foster sustainable and inclusive economic growth and integrate into the global economy.

Less than three weeks ago, we witnessed the adoption of the universal and revolutionary 2030 Agenda with its focus on eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, fostering shared prosperity, peace and environmental sustainability.

And less than five months ago, the African Unions' Agenda 2063 and its First Ten Year Implementation Plan, was adopted – a holistic and coherent framework for Africa's development which brings together priorities from global, continental, regional and national plans.

Through today's, meeting, you bring to the fore a critical success factor for both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, namely regional integration in Africa.

The commitment and determination of African member states to promote regional integration is commendable and I welcome the decision taken by the Heads of States and Government at the African Union Assembly earlier this year, to launch negotiations on the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA).

The recent signing on 10 June 2015 of the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) Agreement is a milestone for regional integration, spanning 26 African countries, and accounting for more than half of Africa's population and GDP. It is a welcome step forward and should serve as a launching pad for the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area.

These initiatives should not, however, be simply about trade liberalization between African countries. Rather they should constitute an important pillar of the continent's strategy for structural economic transformation. They should focus on harmonizing policies, enhancing infrastructure development and promoting public-private partnerships.

And they should be anchored in the well-being of the African people. Ordinary citizens should enjoy the benefits associated with regional integration. Efforts should therefore be made to put in place favorable conditions that enhance the skills and capabilities of Africa's labor force, especially, those of the youth and women.

These efforts towards continental regional integration will no doubt place Africa in a better position to harness the full potential of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I encourage African leaders to sustain the political will and commitment needed for truly beneficial regional integration. The UN must also assist the African Union and its Regional Economic Communities as they work to put in place policies that support regional integration.

Ladies and gentlemen, as President of the General Assembly for this 70th session, I aim to support member states to make early progress towards sustainable development. To that end I will hold a high level thematic debate in April of next year to highlight early successes and to advance a coherent response to the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Agenda and to – I hope – an ambitious and universal climate agreement. This meeting will also ensure constructive and effective engagement by the UN system and other stakeholders.

African countries and regions must be at the heart of these discussions and I encourage all of you to actively participate in our discussions.

Through national leadership, regional integration, international cooperation and multi-stakeholder engagement, during this anniversary year, we can move together from commitments to action.

I thank you for your kind attention.