

16 February 2016

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament**

Distinguished Parliamentarians, Ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honor to come before this Committee as the first Danish President of the UN General Assembly.

Since taking up office last September, I have been dealing with the many contradictions that we see in our world today.

At times, it seems that we, the international community, are turning a corner – particularly in relation to sustainable development.

But at other times, we seem to be going backwards.

This somewhat bi-polar reality is no doubt been felt here in the European Parliament as well, given that many of the challenges that the EU faces today are global in nature.

In many respects, of course, the EU and the UN have a shared history, common values and indeed a common destiny.

And opportunities for the UN are opportunities for the EU also.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for example, is a genuinely revolutionary and a source of enormous hope for all of us.

Through it, 193 member states have agreed a framework of change for people, planet, prosperity and peace.

Collectively, we have agreed that the change we need requires a transformation of the very economic, social and governance structures that underpin our societies today.

Part of that transformation has been elaborated on in great detail through the Paris Climate Agreement – an incredible breakthrough in its own right.

Both of these agreements prove once again the relevance and value of the United Nations.

And, much as some would like to deny it, they demonstrate also the great inter-dependence that defines our world today.

But if these agreements are to amount to anything, then we need to see action now.

We need to build on the momentum of last year.

We need to transform the ownership and energy around these agreements into real investment and tangible action both domestically here in Europe and internationally.

Thankfully, we are starting from a solid base.

The Millennium Development Goals helped deliver some amazing improvements in human development and demonstrated what the international community can achieve when united around a common cause.

Solidarity from the EU and its member states in support of the MDGs was crucial and is something we should all be proud of.

And, when it comes to the shift to a low carbon, inclusive and climate resilient economy, Europe is already leading the way and has been joined by many other countries, private companies, city majors, civil society and others.

Now, we need to take the mantle of the SDGs and run with it.

To build a sustainable global infrastructure over the next fifteen years, trillions of dollars of investment are needed.

To realize the rights of women and girls, power dynamics and gender stereotypes must be confronted.

To eradicate extreme poverty and reduce inequalities, corporate tax avoidance must be tackled and development assistance to least developed countries must be increased.

And to build more peaceful societies, we must address exclusion head on; strengthen the protection of civil and political rights and prioritize investment in effective, inclusive and accountable institutions.

Of course, the transformation we need will not happen from government action alone.

A huge share of the investment, in sustainable energy and infrastructure, for example, has to come from private sources such as companies, capital investors and pension funds.

And for that, governments need to create a framework for markets that makes green investment the most obviously safer and better investment – both for business and for all of us.

But, the contradictions I referred to a few moments ago, ladies and gentlemen, are such that as these breakthroughs were being reached last year, we were simultaneously seeing global crises escalate:

- an incredible and deeply disturbing humanitarian crisis;
- violent extremism that has led to the slaughter of innocence right around the world;
- the proliferation of all sorts of weapons, and the emergence of new threats from global epidemics and in cyberspace.
- And conflicts in the Middle East and Africa that are causing untold pain and misery, death and destruction for millions.

On these many issues, sadly, the UN and multilateralism more broadly is failing.

Yes, there are examples where multilateralism is protecting people and the peace but overall, we simply cannot be content with what we are currently achieving.

Take the Syrian conflict for example.

While there are certainly individual countries which bear greater responsibility for the current situation than most, to me this conflict also captures perfectly some of the glaring shortcomings in our collective approach to international peace and security.

It demonstrates our inability to prevent tensions from escalating into all out conflict; to protect civilians during conflict; and to facilitate peaceful political settlements when they are desperately needed.

It demonstrates also an inability to conduct and sustain a massive humanitarian response.

Thousands of Syrian civilians are suffering under the latest escalations of bombings and violence; basic humanitarian assistance continues to be denied to many; people are dying almost daily in search of a safer future in Europe and millions of refugees are being left without hope.

In this context, it is absolutely crucial that we use May's World Humanitarian Summit and September's GA meeting on large movements of migrants and refugees, to devise more credible, equitable and sustainable responses to global humanitarian crises.

And it is high time that we reassert the basic codes and norms that collectively, we agreed to abide by to protect the world's most vulnerable – international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law.

In all of this, the world needs a Europe that is willing to lead.

Clearly, the current refugee crisis is unprecedented in its scale, presents challenges to many member states and has spread panic and fear in many European capitals.

But our inability to find solutions is jeopardizing lives and it is straining the very bond that has tied our Union together.

Sadly, the distrust among member states and our populations, runs deep.

But right now, our leaders and this great Parliament must find ways to rediscover the values that united us these past sixty years.

Ladies and gentlemen, as the UN celebrates its 70th anniversary, it is clear that it must evolve to respond to today's challenges.

As President of the General Assembly, through three high level debates in April, May and July, I am asking member states and others to reflect on what needs to change to improve the UN's capacity to maintain peace and security, protect human rights and ensure sustainable development.

Managing that change will be at the heart of the mandate handed to the next UN Secretary General, who will to be appointed later this year.

She – and I believe we are overdue a female Secretary General – must help the UN to renew itself.

This year, for the first time, the General Assembly has a more prominent role in the selection and appointment process.

And over the coming months, I will convene informal dialogues between the candidates and the entire UN membership so as to increase transparency around the process and improve our prospects of getting the best possible candidate to lead our United Nations.

Ladies and gentlemen, these are just some of the issues that are preoccupying the UN General Assembly.

But let me conclude with a message from my heart, as a former speaker of the Danish Parliament and as a proud European citizen.

From where I sit today, I can see that the EU collectively continues to play a key role within the international community of nations.

But current tensions and divisions are undermining its voice, its reputation and by extension, its influence.

Only a strong and united EU – one that sticks to its true values – can help the world address the many global challenges we face today.

I therefore urge all of you to work together to help bring this united EU to the fore once again.

Thank you.