

29 February 2016

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
At the Opening plenary of the UN Human Rights Council**

Heads of State and Government, Honourable Ministers, Mr President, High Commissioner, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to address you this morning.

2016 is a year of important anniversaries – for the United Nations; the International Covenants; the Right to Development and for this body, the Human Rights Council.

Anniversaries which provide us with an opportunity to reflect honestly and openly on what we have achieved and where we must improve.

These past 70 years, collectively, we have made considerable progress – ending colonialism; overseeing a rise in global living standards; securing peace across large swathes of our world; and creating international institutions like the Human Rights Council to advance human dignity and equality for all.

But we have had some immense failings too – allowing famines to rob millions of a future; sitting by as mass atrocity crimes happen before our eyes; investing in weapons over education or health; and advancing economic development that is leading to catastrophic climate change and leading to inequality on an unprecedented scale.

And today, our world is in a period of great flux.

2015 was an incredibly good year for multilateralism delivering agreements that provide us with enormous hope but it was also a year of ominous crises, deadly conflicts and gross human rights violations.

The toll in suffering and death from recent crisis is particularly appalling.

The disregard for human life, for human rights and for humanitarian law – especially related to the Syria crisis – is unacceptable. And we who have signed up to the UN Charter must not ignore from this terrible reality.

We must do more to uphold the laws and principles that protect the dignity and rights of civilians.

We must find ways to ensure access to humanitarian assistance for those who need it.

We must combat violent extremism with measures that stem its underlying causes.

We must invest more in prevention and finding peaceful settlements.

And we must find the courage to live up to our obligations towards refugees and migrants.

But what we must not do, is respond to these challenges with heavy-handed measures that only make matters worse.

We must not discriminate against specific groups.

We must not attack civil society or further restrict their ability to conduct their legitimate activities.

And we must not allow values of equality and humanity be overpowered by racism or xenophobia: After all, we are all born, free and equal, in dignity and rights.

In these past 10 years, the Human Rights Council has proven its value on these very issues and more.

The Council has become a vital part of the United Nations architecture.

Through the Universal Periodic Review, we have a tool which enables every State to enter into dialogue about human rights issues with other States and inter-governmental and non-governmental actors.

Its recommendations, together with those from the Council's expert Special Procedures mandate-holders and the Treaty Bodies, make up a powerful roadmap for change, if implemented.

The Human Rights Council has also grown increasingly responsive to sudden emergencies and plays an important role highlighting situations that require immediate attention by the whole UN.

As it embarks on the next 10 years, I am confident that the Council will go from strength to strength.

Human Rights, however, as the work of the Council demonstrates, cannot be looked at in isolation.

The three pillars of the UN are, as we know, profoundly linked.

There can be no sustainable development, and no long-term peace, if people's rights are violated or ignored.

This fact is at the heart of the Secretary General's Human Rights Up Front policy which pledges to integrate human rights throughout the United Nations, and to increase the focus on prevention.

This fact is also at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development where all States have committed to take action to further the dignity, global equality, security, prosperity and human rights of all.

To advance gender equality and empower women and girls.

To ensure sound management and fair distribution of the earth's finite resources.

And to support the health and vitality of our planet including through an upsurge in green investment which is good for our futures and good for business too.

Now the daunting task of implementation is before us.

National governments must determine what they will seek to change.

International partners must scale up their financial and other support.

Non-state actors, like civil society, must be given the space to fully and freely participate in society and support accountability for implementation.

And international platforms, like the Human Rights Council, must consider what they can do to support implementation and accountability.

These are among the issues I hope to address at a High Level debate on 12-13 July, dedicated to action on human rights issues that can catalyse SDG implementation and support global peace.

Excellencies, the United Nations Charter begins with ‘We the peoples’

As you mark the 10th Anniversary of this Council, I encourage you all to work together to advance the human rights in both covenants as well as the right to development.

Because it is only by doing so, that we can best serve our peoples.

Thank you.