

4 March 2016

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
To the African Union Permanent Representative Council**

Your Excellency, Ambassador Cherif Mahama Zene,
Your Excellency, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma,
Permanent Representatives and Ambassadors of African Union member states, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor to address the Permanent Representative Council of the African Union in my capacity as the President of the United Nations General Assembly – addressing the African Union, an organization whose growth and development over recent decades has mirrored that seen across much of Africa.

Indeed, the African Union itself represents a broader shift in outlook whereby African countries and regions, emerging from instability which followed the end of colonialism, are asserting themselves on this Continent and beyond; and are driving their own development.

Significant strides have been made in recent years, in consolidating peace and the rule of law; in fostering high levels of economic growth and in advancing human development.

Now, with the adoption of Agenda 2063, which informed the universal Sustainable Development Goals, the African Continent has set for itself a truly transformative development agenda for the next 50-years.

I commend African leaders for this notable progress and encourage all of you to leave no stone unturned to address the challenges confronting the Continent and its people.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am grateful for the opportunity to exchange views on the priorities and agenda of the General Assembly during the 70th session – and on what they mean for you.

2015 was a momentous year for multilateralism with major breakthroughs reached here in Addis, in Sendai, New York and Paris.

Breakthroughs that I hope will herald a new era in global cooperation and a new type of economic development – one that is good for people and for the planet.

Now, we need to transform the energy around these agreements into real investment and tangible action both here on the African Continent and internationally.

Let me quickly touch on five areas that I feel are absolutely crucial to that transformation, including here in Africa.

First, we must continue to focus on human development – extending access to social protection, quality education, sound health systems and safe and affordable drinking water. We will not end poverty or bring about shared prosperity without this solid basis.

Second, we must invest in transformative sectors like agriculture, energy and infrastructure to bring about the structural transformation that is needed to generate jobs and public revenues. And we must ensure that the investment in these sectors is the right investment – low-carbon and climate resilient.

Third, we must tackle discrimination and inequalities. Gender Equality must be at the fore of everything we do – I am absolutely convinced of this.

We must also reduce income inequalities which are particularly apparent in many countries approaching middle-income status.

Fourth, we must invest in more peaceful societies: addressing exclusion head on; protecting civil and political rights and investing in effective, inclusive and accountable institutions.

From the Arab Spring to the Middle East, we are seeing very clearly that winner takes all electoral processes are only sustainable if accompanied by mechanisms to protect the rights and interests of minorities – social division is detrimental to development.

And, fifth, we need early action and ambitious partnerships to make all of this happen.

Your governments and your people will lead the transformation set out in the SDGs and Agenda 2063 – including by improving governance and policies and by strengthening and increasing the domestic taxation base. Planning and budgetary processes must be reviewed with a view to determining what needs to change to meet these objectives.

And international partners must also play their part: delivering on the 0.7% ODA and climate finance promises; supporting capacity development; trade and access to new technologies.

And all countries, individually and collectively, must clamp down on illicit financial flows that are costing this continent over 50 billion, or double ODA receipts.

The private sector, from small and medium size enterprises to large corporations and the global finance industry, can bring the crucial investment, jobs and innovation that our global transformation requires. And civil society can support both implementation and accountability.

But both require the right enabling environment.

As a politician for over fifty years, I know all about criticism, but I remain 100% convinced that transparency, tolerance and fundamental freedoms are absolutely key to stable democracies and prosperous societies.

Excellencies, the SDGs are supremely ambitious and if we are to be true to our motto of “leaving no one behind”, then we must begin by meaningfully addressing the current global refugee and humanitarian crisis.

It is unprecedented in its scale and is causing tremendous suffering for millions. It presents challenges to many countries; has seen an erosion of international norms and spread panic in many parts of the world.

While world attention has focussed on the Mediterranean and Syrian crisis, I am keenly aware that this crisis is also very much present here in on the African Continent.

African countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Chad and Tanzania continue to carry the heavy burden of refugees from neighbouring counties such as Eritrea, South Sudan, Somalia, Central African Republic and Burundi.

I am committed to highlighting the plight of all refugees and to working with all stakeholders to tackle the funding, institutional and policy constraints. The World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May is an excellent opportunity to do so and I urge you all to ensure that the voice of Africa is heard loud and clear at that Summit.

The GA high level meeting on large movements of migrants and refugees on 19 September is a similarly important opportunity.

Mr Chair, like many parts of the world, Africa continues to face major challenges to peace and security.

Armed conflicts and political tensions in several parts of the world including in Syria, Iraq, Ukraine, South Sudan and elsewhere on the African continent, are also causing untold pain and misery, death and destruction, aided by the continued proliferation of all sorts of weapons.

A new wave of terrorist attacks from violent extremist groups have unleashed untold suffering on innocent people right across the continent. The Secretary General’s new Plan of Action on this issue is timely and emphasises the importance of addressing this challenge in a way that protects human rights and addresses root causes.

We are also seeing the emergence of new threats in cyberspace and through epidemics like Ebola – and I wish to pay tribute to the countries most affected by that crisis for the herculean efforts of your governments and your people.

On all of these issues, I urge African countries, collectively and individually to do your part.

Regional and sub-regional organizations such as the African Union are at the forefront of addressing a wide range of issues and challenges in their respective regions including in areas of peace and security, human rights and development.

Regional cooperation has become a cornerstone of the UN as clearly recognized and articulated in Chapter VIII of the Charter as well as several resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

This cooperation has over the years produced tangible results.

Strengthening these partnerships is about comparative advantages, complementarity and burden sharing.

The UN/AU Partnership on Africa's Agenda Integration (PAIDA) and the Ten-Year-Capacity-Building Programme and the New Partnership for Africa's Development are critical in this regard.

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 ensure sustainable development, maintain peace and security, protect human rights.

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 – a development that I am sure will be of interest a Continent that continues to be without a Permanent member on the Security Council.

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.

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

African countries, which collectively represent the largest coherent voting bloc in the General Assembly, can play a critical role in various processes before our Assembly.

I count on the full engagement of your leaders in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and other related processes.

We must continue to work together to bring true and real change in the lives of our people that can eradicate poverty and put the world on the right path towards peaceful societies, human rights and inclusive sustainable development.

Thank you.