

6 May 2016

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
At the opening of the High-Level Conversation on Religions for Peace**

Honorable Ministers, High Representative Al-Nasser, the Honorable Kevin Rudd, Ambassador Bokhari, Assistant Director-General La Rue, Ladies and gentlemen, a very good morning to you all.

Since its inception, the UN has worked for the betterment of humanity, by seeking to maintain international peace and security, promoting human rights and fostering sustainable development.

Buttressing all of its efforts, however, has been the promotion of understanding, tolerance, respect and dialogue between and among diverse cultures, civilizations, faiths and peoples.

And in many ways, these are now prerequisites for achieving many of the goals that we as human beings and the United Nations aspire to today.

Terrorist attacks all over the world, however, demonstrate very clearly that achieving harmony and strengthening intercultural and interreligious dialogue is a great challenge and perhaps more important today than at any time in our recent past.

Violent extremism is a particularly serious concern.

It pains me, as I'm sure it pains all of you, to witness the barbarity and absolute disregard for human life and human dignity demonstrated by these extremists, regardless of what motivates them.

These individuals and groups – fuelled by a desire to exploit religious, sectarian and ethnic differences – seek to undermine our shared humanity, our cultural heritage and the very values upon which this Organisation is based.

There is a clear need for the international community to unite across all religions and all countries in response to such threats; to align strategies and to provide resources commensurate to the task we face.

As we embark on the 10 year review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and following the tabling of the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, member states and the UN system now have a good opportunity to advance their thinking on how best to tackle these challenges.

All actors must, however, do so in a manner that promotes respect for and the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We can learn also from the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, which outlines a comprehensive vision to transform our societies for the benefit all.

Its interconnected goals – on poverty, inequalities, economic growth, climate change, gender equality, just societies etc – underline that there can be no sustainable development without peace; no peace without sustainable development; and neither without human rights.

In this regard, conducting wider civil dialogue, creating transparent, inclusive and accountable institutions or building effective and sustainable capacities for conflict prevention and resolution, are as critical to advancing our broader societal objectives as a revived economy or sustainable infrastructure.

Through core initiatives on youth, education, media and migration etc, UN agencies like UNESCO and many other organizations with us today, can make significant contributions to realising the new Agenda.

And through events like today's, we can, collectively, advance solutions to meet our common goals in a world without terrorism and violent extremism.

All faith traditions have a role to play, and I am honoured to be here today among women and men of various religions, all equally devoted to peace, tolerance and mutual respect.

Next week, I will host a High-Level Thematic Debate devoted to peace and security which is clearly linked to your discussions today.

I am very pleased that a significant number of Ministers will attend, using this platform to help the UN tackle more effectively today's peace and security challenges – including those relating to violent extremism and those emanating from non-state and transnational actors.

I am sure that today's discussion can inform our deliberations next week and broaden our understanding of how we can all live together in peace, harmony, dignity and rights.

Thank you.