

28 May 2016

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
At the opening of ‘The UN at a crossroads’ : Roundtable with leading
thinkers and research centers**

Excellencies, Mr Moderator, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to be in Cairo today to discuss challenges to regional and global peace and security and, in particular, the UN’s role in addressing them.

Being here in the Middle East, this theme takes on a great sense of urgency:

- A protracted conflict in Syria, fragile progress in Yemen and Libya
- Destructive and inhumane terrorist groups like the Islamic State;
- the Israeli/Palestinian conflict that remains without peaceful solution;
- Immense strains on Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey in the face of an incredible refugee and humanitarian crisis;
- the escalation of sectarian divisions and tensions between regional powers;
- the destabilising effect of climate change, droughts and land degradation,
- and too many instances where neither power nor prosperity are shared in a way that brings societies together.

Many of these challenges, however, are not unique to the Middle East.

So far this year, I have held two high level thematic debates on both the SDGs and Climate and on Peace and Security. A third will take place on 12-13 July focussing on human rights.

All three are looking at how collectively we can make progress across all three pillars and how the UN can assist member states in this regard.

In terms of what member states can do, the answers are pretty simple though not easy.

Member states must first and foremost work harder to make their societies, their economies and their politics more inclusive and more sustainable – that is the message at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Too often, governments have failed to ensure that all segments of society benefit from economic development.

Too often, governments have ignored the science of climate change and done far too little to shift to low-carbon climate resilient economies.

And too often, faced with security threats or demands for better governance, governments have reacted rashly – clamping down on civil society; eroding civil liberties or excluding political opponents.

And while motivations may differ for taking such action, the impact is always the same – confidence in public institutions dwindles, societies become more polarized and people move closer to violence or extremism.

This has to change because as former Secretary General Kofi Annan says, there can be no peace without development, no development without peace and neither without human rights.

At the same time, the international community and the UN especially, can and must do much more to support member states make progress across all three pillars.

As the UN marks its 70th anniversary, the Organization itself is very much at a cross roads, particularly in the area of peace and security.

The architecture developed these past 7 decades is struggling to keep pace with today's and tomorrow's threats and geopolitical tensions, in a way that is undermining member state trust in the organization.

Last year, member states joined hands in adopting the SDGs and the Paris climate agreement.

And in the security sphere, we saw renewed cooperation between major powers on Iran and even on Syria.

Now, we must build on that spirit.

With major UN reviews underway on peace and security matters and a new Secretary-General to be selected over the next six months, there is a real opportunity to do just that over the coming period.

In particular, we must take concrete action to make the UN more relevant, credible, legitimate and capable for major, regional and local powers alike.

This includes making the UN Security Council more representative and more effective, for example, by addressing the use of the veto in situations involving mass atrocity crimes.

But it also includes agreeing budgetary and institutional reforms to prioritize political solutions and prevention across every aspect of the UN's approach to sustaining peace.

The UN also needs to work more seamlessly across its peace and security, sustainable development and human rights pillars; engage more consistently with affected communities and ensure women are more involved in both preventing and resolving conflicts.

There is also a need to identify concrete ways for the Organization to help tackle global terrorism and prevent violent extremism, including in the context of UN mandated missions and operations.

And finally, there is a need for more strategic cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations and for opportunities to involve those member states who wish to play greater roles in global peace and security.

The next UN Secretary-General will therefore have a unique window of opportunity early in her or his term to put those changes into place.

For that, she or he will need sustained support from member states including regional powers like Egypt so I look forward to hearing your views on these issues.

Before finishing, let me draw your attention to one other issue – the 60million people displaced in our world today.

Having just participated in the World Humanitarian Summit and visited a refugee camp in Turkey, regrettably, it seems that we remain a long way off the solutions that are desperately needed.

On 19 September, member states will gather in New York for a Summit on how to address large movements of migrants and refugees and I sincerely hope that that Summit will signal a shift in momentum so that those 60million people can begin to experience hope and the solidarity of the international community.

Let me conclude by thanking Mr Ashraf Swelam and the Cairo regional Center for Training on Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa.

Ashraf and his team made a great contribution to preparations for my high-level thematic debate so I know that today again, we are in good hands.

Thank you.