

29 June 2016

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
On The Way Forward for the Rule of Law and Human Rights Agenda**

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a pleasure to be here to reflect on this excellent discussion this morning.

Throughout my time as President of the United Nations General Assembly, I have underscored the intimate connection between the rule of law, human rights, sustainable development and peace.

In less than two weeks' time, I will hold a high level thematic debate on Human Rights on 12-13 July which will focus minds on those exact linkages including through a dedicated segment on the rule of law.

And I look forward very much to the active participation of many present here today at that event.

Normally, at the UN, we talk about linkages in purely abstract terms but today we have heard first-hand the account of Elena from Guatemala.

She lived through the horror and turmoil of conflict at great personal cost.

But she has now emerged from the evils of war, sexual violence, forced displacement and extreme deprivation and she done so with great dignity and humanity.

The justice she seeks is not about retribution.

It is dedicated to the empowerment of others – of women, of her community, of all people living through conflict and of everyone in this room today.

She had the courage and conviction to take her testimony to court.

In this difficult process, she sought inspiration and support from her family and from the women of her community.

She has properly reminded us that her intentions were not purely personal.

This step was based on a profound belief that she could contribute to building peace in Guatemala.

The values demonstrated by Elena and her story – of human dignity, justice, community, empowerment and mutual reciprocity – are the values which keep us grounded and that inspire the work of the United Nations.

We have also heard from colleagues from South Africa, Mali and Guatemala who are directly engaged in the difficult work of fostering justice and human security and upholding human rights.

They have carefully and honestly outlined the challenges they face.

They have described the complexities of profound social and economic inequality; of working in environments where political power is unfettered; and of addressing the acute risks which violent extremism places on the fabric of society.

I am humbled to hear about their endeavours and I am again reminded of the powerful force for good that the United Nations can be.

Reflecting on these accounts I would like to leave you with three messages:

- Firstly, I want to echo each of this morning's presenters in emphasizing that the rule of law is foundational for sustaining peace and fostering sustainable development.

This is one of three or four major game-changers at the heart of the 2030 Agenda and is, as you know, elaborated upon in detail in Goal 16 in particular.

Establishing the rule of law, justice and security, is a universal concern for all member states which does not happen overnight.

It is a complex and iterative process subject to political challenges and setbacks.

It takes generations and the dedication of every individual in any given society whether they are villager, visitor, citizen, business person, activist or political leader.

- Secondly, the United Nations should ensure that a sufficient portion of its vast capacities are used to support these efforts.

Whether we are diplomats, peacekeepers, human rights experts, political types or development practitioners – establishing the foundations for peace and development is the responsibility of all.

In practice, this means that the UN development system understands that a peacekeeping mandate is a major part of their responsibilities.

It means that the UN's peace and security and human rights pillars should reinforce the Sustainable Development Agenda.

And it means that the prevention of violence and human rights abuses should be understood as a core responsibility of all pillars of the United Nations.

- Thirdly, where we have established the momentum for working jointly then let us not let up.

The Global Focal Point is a simple system based on a culture of working jointly within the UN and with national partners and donors.

The philosophy is based on a working culture where objectives are shared and supported by UNDP, DPKO and other rule of law partners like OHCHR, UNWOMEN and UNODC.

Now that Member States have come together to embrace the need to “sustain peace”, it is critical that the United Nations system adopt exactly this type of mutually supportive approach – based on unity of effort – to deliver collectively owned objectives.

This was one of the key messages emerging from my high level thematic debate on peace and security in May.

To conclude, I would like to thank UNDP for providing the opportunity to address you on this crucial topic.

Realizing the SDGs, realizing the rights of all human beings and delivering the peace and justice that this Organization was established to deliver, is an incredible challenge.

It will only happen, however, if we continue to invest in strengthening the rule of law; to support people like Elena in the pursuit of justice and to work together to make change happen – no matter how slow or how difficult.

I look forward to hearing the conclusions of your deliberations.