

13 July 2016

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
At the opening of the side event “How the Global South shaped the
international human rights system”**

Minister Pind, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon to you all.

Thank you very much to Denmark and the IPI for hosting us today and for choosing such an interesting topic to bring us all together.

I am also happy to see in the panel my good friends Ambassador Pobee of Ghana and Ambassador Rattray of Jamaica.

Over the last two days, the High Level Thematic Debate on human rights has, in many ways, been a good opportunity to reflect on the topic of this event.

Of course, no-one referred explicitly to the lack of trust and unity between the different regional constituencies on human rights or about perceptions relating to the geographical home of human rights but those issues are always bubbling below the surface.

This is particularly evident around ideas that the global north only cares about civil political rights and that the global south only cares about economic, social and cultural rights – which is of course incorrect in both cases.

It is also, as this event indicates, not particularly reflective of the history of human rights.

But perhaps, the key question we should be asking is whether those perceptions are changing or not.

Personally I think they are.

Take the 2030 Agenda for example, where unity between member states was a central feature, where universality was a key principle.

Substantively, the 2030 Agenda also recognises explicitly, for example the links between access to justice, accountable institutions, better governance and sustainable development; as well as the links between inequality, global injustice, the right to development and poverty eradication.

In this sense, it is an excellent example of the convergence of interests, challenges and opportunities among member states that is much more reflective of the true origins of human rights.

Similar convergence was evident in the high level thematic debate – albeit in a less positive way.

When we discussed discrimination, we discussed issues that are happening right now in the global north and the global south – racial discrimination; discrimination against the LGBT community; discrimination against migrants and refugees; inequalities within and between states etc.

When we discussed challenges to governance, we looked at examples of ownership being taken in the global south; lessons that are to be learned by the global north.

When we discussed civil society space; we discussed restrictive laws which are now regrettably prevalent in every region of the world.

All of which shows that whatever the perceptions, right now all countries are facing significant human rights challenges.

And it is critical that all countries recommit themselves to the fundamental values that underpin human rights – to tolerance, dignity, justice, liberty, pluralism, equality.

Indeed, perhaps doing so would be the best way to change any views that ignore the true origins and the true universality of human rights.

Thank you.