

12 December 2016

71st session of the General Assembly

**Opening Remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson,
2016 Global Humanitarian Policy Forum**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today to open this year's Global Humanitarian Policy Forum, and to mark the 25th anniversary of a landmark achievement of the General Assembly – resolution 46/182 'Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations'.

At its adoption, the resolution was a forceful expression by the international community of its collective commitment to helping others in their hour of greatest need.

For humanitarians it laid the foundations for today's global system – enabling assistance to be better structured, organized and delivered.

And for those in need of assistance, the resolution enabled millions of people over the next 25 years to receive desperately needed humanitarian aid to survive the horrors of war and the ravages of natural disaster.

Resolution 46/182 spurred the establishment of humanitarian instruments that now form the backbone of our operational responses.

I recall indeed, when my own country, Fiji, was hit by Tropical Cyclone Winston in February this year, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was on hand to coordinate assistance from international partners, and to support government-led humanitarian efforts.

The litany of humanitarian emergencies, to which the system created by resolution 46/182 has responded over the past 25 years, is extensive. Humanitarian actors both within and outside the UN should be proud of their achievements for the lives they have saved, the suffering they have alleviated, and the dignity they have helped restore to affected people.

While this is a moment for commemoration, it is also one where we must reflect on the ever-increasing challenges facing the humanitarian system.

Almost 93 million people are currently in need of protection and humanitarian assistance.

And over the past decade, the number of people affected by humanitarian crises has almost doubled. Indeed, humanitarian assistance designed for acute emergency situations is increasingly unable to cope with the scale of need.

The compounding effects of protracted conflicts, the unending war in Syria, and the devastating impacts of climate change, extreme weather, and natural disasters, are threatening to overwhelm an overburdened system.

In this context, it is vital that the international community regularly looks at ways to adapt the humanitarian system to changing realities.

The General Assembly humanitarian resolution, and initiatives such as the World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul this year, and the Agenda for Humanity, are critical in this regard.

And so too is finding long-term, sustainable solutions based on recognition of the interlinkages between sustainable development, peace and security, human rights, and humanitarian action.

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction – which address many of the root causes of humanitarian need, including conflict, climate change, and environmental degradation – must be prioritized.

In addition, the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, and commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit must be implemented without delay.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Events such as today's Global Humanitarian Policy Forum are vital to our efforts to improve humanitarian responses, reduce underlying causes, build resilience, and ensure that development gains reach our most vulnerable people – namely the millions who are relying on us for humanitarian assistance.

I wish you all the best for a highly successful Forum.

Thank you.

I now have the honour to pass the floor to Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson. As you all know, he is one of the United Nations' most distinguished and committed humanitarians.

He helped to negotiate resolution 46/182 in 1991, served as the UN's first Emergency Relief Coordinator from 1992 to 1993, and has always brought a humanitarian perspective to his work as Deputy Secretary-General. Please join me in welcoming Jan Eliasson to the podium.