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**Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the International
Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic,
Social and Cultural Rights**

Excellencies,
Deputy Secretary-General,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fifty years ago, the General Assembly made an historic advancement in our efforts to promote and protect human rights across our globe, through the adoption of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

This landmark achievement built upon the commitments in the UN Charter, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, by legally obligating States – for the first time – to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights inherent in each and every individual.

In the fifty years since their adoption, the Covenants have become cornerstones of both international law, and the international human rights framework, based on the fundamental recognition of the universality, indivisibility, and interdependent nature of human rights.

Across our world, the Human Rights Covenants have helped to shape Constitutions and laws, policies and justice systems.

They have had a transformative effect on the lives of people across the globe.

This has been so because the power of the Covenants resides in their ability to protect universal rights and freedoms in diverse circumstances and situations.

And the expert committees that uphold the implementation of the Covenants have ensured that they continue to frame our policy responses to a complex and rapidly changing world.

But despite this great progress, we live in times when people across our world are being denied their most fundamental human rights.

Violent extremism is on the rise, and waves of intolerance and hate are targeting minorities, migrants, and our most vulnerable.

Greater restrictions are being placed on our most basic rights and freedoms: including the right to life, liberty and security; to equality before the law; to gender equality, education, and health; to freedom of expression, worship and association; and to freedom from discrimination, torture, slavery and hunger.

Today’s commemoration is a timely reminder of the power of these Covenants to ensure States uphold the rights of all their people.

Distinguished Delegates,

As Governments, civil society, and the global public, focus on ramping up implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the mutually reinforcing nature of the pillars of human rights, peace and security, and the development, could not be clearer.

When people’s human rights are violated, when they live in fear, when they are affected by conflict and violence, and when they are subject to discrimination, marginalization, intolerance, poverty, and corruption, neither sustainable development, nor sustainable peace, are attainable.

The 2030 Agenda is premised on the fundamental recognition of human rights for all. And taking a comprehensive and integrated approach to development, the 2030 Agenda encapsulates the indivisibility and inter-dependence of the human rights set out in both covenants.

An effective implementation of the Agenda requires that this be done in a manner consistent with the UN Charter, international treaties, and international law.

Done the right way, achievement of the 2030 Agenda, and of the Human Rights Covenants, will have to proceed hand in hand.

Indeed, the mantra of the 2030 Agenda of “leave no one behind” recalls the principles of non-discrimination and equality that underlie the two Covenants.

And Sustainable Development Goal 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice, and effective and accountable institutions is fundamental to achieving success in all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

I call on all Member States who have yet to ratify either or both Covenants to take the opportunity of this commemorative year to do so.

The promotion and protection of human rights is a commitment that requires constant vigilance by us all.

Allow me here to quote John Donne's celebrated verse, "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." These words ring as true today as when they were written four hundred years ago.

Let us therefore mark the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Covenants by reaffirming our commitment:

- to realizing the human rights of all people;
- to protecting those who are suffering injustice;
- to fighting xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination;
- to promoting equality and empowerment;
- and to increasing global awareness and understanding of human rights, as fundamental to all our lives.

There is much we can do better in our efforts to realize the political, economic and social rights of mankind. And in doing so, we will do well to aim for greater respect and stronger implementation of the two Covenants we celebrate today.

I thank you.