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71st session of the General Assembly

**Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Formal Session of the First Committee**

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address the First Committee this afternoon.

I would like to begin by congratulating Ambassador Boukadoum for his election as Chair of the Committee, as well as the other members of the Bureau.

The General Assembly's First Committee is tasked with advancing one of the most gravely consequential mandates of the UN Charter – the maintenance of international peace and security, through the promotion of disarmament, arms control, non-proliferation, and collective approaches to international security.

In recent years, however, the quantity of arms around the world has been increasing, global insecurity rising, and new threats and challenges emerging.

The work, and effective functioning, of this Committee has never been more vital.

Former US President, Dwight Eisenhower, threw the futility and high cost of arms into sharp relief when he said: “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.

It is a sentiment that I urge you all to consider closely as you undertake your work this Session.

Global military spending currently stands at over \$1.7 trillion annually. At the same time, hundreds of millions of people live in extreme poverty, suffering from food and water insecurity, and wanting for housing and basic education.

It is unconscionable that funds are being diverted away from meeting the basic human needs of people and being spent instead on weapons.

It is an expense that is draining national and global economies.

Last year, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted, setting out, for the first time, a universal masterplan that – if implemented urgently, effectively and at scale – will build peaceful and inclusive societies, end extreme poverty, empower women and girls, increase prosperity, and combat climate change.

It is now a global priority to ensure that these words are translated into concrete action.

Within my Office, we have made driving implementation of the SDGs the principle objective of the 71st Session of the General Assembly.

The First Committee has a critical role to play in the realization of the 2030 Agenda.

Disarmament, peace and security, development, and human rights are all inherently interrelated.

There can, after all, be no sustainable peace without sustainable development, and no sustainable development without sustainable peace.

One goal in particular – Goal 16 – has cross-cutting impact for the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals, and it specifically recognizes the importance of reducing illicit financial and arms flows, promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, strengthening the rule of law, and reducing violence and related deaths.

The critical role of this Committee in transforming our world should not be in doubt.

Distinguished Delegates,

As we meet today, millions of people are being affected by the devastating impacts of armed conflict, fueled by weaponry that the Committee is charged with regulating.

Heavy conventional weapons are destroying cities, homes, businesses, and infrastructure.

The Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons is causing great human suffering – fueling a growth in criminality, weakening economies, setting back development, and undermining political stability.

And land contaminated by mines and explosive remnants of war continue to inflict human suffering and impede post-conflict development.

More action is desperately needed.

The current global momentum to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit arms trade – as underlined in the outcome to the Sixth Biennial Meeting of States on the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons – needs to be built upon.

Member States also need to take steps to achieving our common goal of a mine free world by 2025, including by fulfilling their financial obligations under the Anti-Personnel Landmines Convention.

Distinguished Delegates,

Three weeks ago, in accordance with a resolution emanating from this Committee, I convened a High-Level Meeting on the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

It was an opportunity to refocus attention on the disastrous consequences of the use of nuclear weapons – from death and destruction, to long-term environmental damage.

Coming from the Asia Pacific – a region which still bears the human and environmental scars from nuclear weapons testing – it was a meeting of particular significance.

Put simply, there are no longer any justifications for any more nuclear tests, and I call upon all those who have not yet done so, to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Distinguished delegates,

The First committee forms an integral part of a complex system of bodies tasked with pursuing international disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control issues.

The complexity of this machinery, however, is impeding its ability to fulfil its mandate, as is a lack of political will and trust, which has led to an intractable stalemate in the Conference for Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission.

The work of all of these bodies is far too consequential for this deadlock to persist.

I therefore call on all Member States to renew their commitment to collective action; to end the business-as-usual approach; and to make progress – not only on disarmament, but across the entire disarmament agenda – from the full implementation and universalization of treaties, to driving consensus outcomes in this Committee, to achieving, ultimately, a nuclear weapons free world.

Distinguished Delegates,

Before I conclude, I want to acknowledge the significant work that was undertaken last session on the alignment of the General Assembly agenda with the 2030 Agenda.

I intend to continue these discussions this Session, in order to enhance the synergy and coherence of the work of the General Assembly, its Committees, ECOSOC and other related fora.

In closing, I want to wish all of you – Mr. Chair, the Bureau and Member States – every success during this Session.

Please count on my support, as well as that of my team, during your deliberations.

Thank you.