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71st session of the General Assembly

**Opening remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Formal Session of the Fourth Committee**

Ambassador Drobnyak of Croatia,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

It is an honour to address the Fourth Committee this morning, and I congratulate you, Ambassador Drobnyak, on your election as Chair, as well as the other members of the Bureau.

I would also like to thank the Secretariat staff for their dedicated work in support of the effective and efficient functioning of the Committee.

I wish all of you the best in your efforts to steer the work of the Committee to a successful conclusion.

In this regard, I am aware that important progress has already been made by the Committee, with deliberations on a number of items relating to decolonization, the peaceful uses of outer space, the effects of atomic radiation, and peacekeeping operations.

I congratulate you on your progress to date.

I am also aware that deliberations on a number of critical issues remain ongoing, and I urge you to continue your discussions in a collaborative spirit.

Distinguished Delegates,

The broad-ranging issues addressed by the Fourth Committee are of great importance.

From decolonization to outer space, peacekeeping to Palestinian refugees, from public information to mine action, the work of this Committee reflects issues that have been central for the work of the United Nations since our foundation.

During these 71 years, the UN has achieved great success in driving the decolonization process, with more than 80 former colonies gaining independence, and joining the United Nations family of nations.

I note that seventeen Non-Self-Governing Territories remain on the UN's decolonization agenda. The satisfactory resolution of their status, in line with the principle of self-determination, remains a work to be done.

Each of these cases must be considered in a situationally-specific context, so that acceptable outcomes can be found by and for the people of these territories in line with the UN Charter and the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

As we move past the half-way point of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism it behooves us to resolve the outstanding issues so that these historical legacies can be satisfactorily addressed, once and for all.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted just last year, we now have an agreed way ahead for the development rights of all peoples.

The agenda constitutes a universal masterplan for people, planet, prosperity and peace.

If implemented effectively and at scale, it will enable us to eliminate extreme poverty; empower women and girls; tackle discrimination and inequality; promote the rule of law; combat climate change and protect our planet.

Central to achieving this vision is the creation of peaceful and inclusive societies where no one is left behind.

Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to acknowledge the work being carried out by the Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, and I say the same regarding the Committee on Palestinian Issues – a matter that is particularly close to my heart and that I will return to when it comes before the General Assembly on 29 November.

In recent years, the work of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space has taken on new resonance, with increasing recognition of the importance of space-based technology for securing critical climate data.

The devastating impacts of climate change, and the existential threat it poses to humanity, requires that all nations and all people collaborate in our efforts to reverse its effects.

I therefore call on all Member States to strengthen their cooperation in this area.

Distinguished delegates,

The importance of United Nations peacekeeping operations, and special political missions, to the maintenance of international peace and security, is fundamental.

So too is the link between sustainable peace and sustainable development. Only through the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals will we attain the underlying conditions that will allow sustainable peace to prosper.

Never in the organization's history have so many UN peacekeepers been deployed, to address so many simultaneous security and humanitarian crises. With increasing asymmetrical threats to peace and security, rising levels of violent extremism, and the use of increasingly demanding peacekeeping mandates; UN peacekeepers and personnel face great risks to their safety.

I am sure you all join me in saluting all UN peacekeepers and peacemakers and thanking them for their service.

I also wish to pay tribute to all those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in service to the United Nations including, most recently, two peacekeepers from Chad, killed by terrorist attacks earlier this month while serving in the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

The dedication that UN peacekeepers make to organization requires that we make every effort to support their deployment, including through Mission mandates that are clearly defined and well-funded.

In turn, UN peacekeepers must – as the vast majority do – also uphold the highest standards of ethical behavior and discipline in the field, including by adhering to the Code of Personal Conduct for Blue Helmets, the Zero Tolerance Policy for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and following both the letter and spirit of Mission mandates. In the few cases where misconduct occurs, accountability must follow.

Distinguished Delegates,

The scale and number of crisis across our world is placing unprecedented strain on the resources of the United Nations system. As the experts who drafted the 2015 UN peace and security reviews on Peace Operations, Implementation of Security Council resolution 1325, and on UN Peacebuilding, made clear – a business-as-usual approach is no longer acceptable.

Among the cross-cutting and complementary recommendations of the Reviews, was the need for greater attention to conflict prevention, including through the use of special political missions and other preventative diplomacy tools.

The need to build coherence in the UN's engagements at all stages of conflict, and across all pillars of its work, was also emphasized. Our attention was directed the need to better manage Mission transitions, to break destructive cycles of countries' lapsing and relapsing into conflict and to strengthening cooperation with regional and sub-regional organizations.

The 'sustaining peace' resolutions adopted earlier this year by the General Assembly, and the Security Council, offer us a solid opportunity to examine such issues. The resolutions drive our efforts to bring

longer-term, more comprehensive perspectives to peace and security, and we must make full use of them.

We must also give further consideration to how we can ensure that UN Peacekeeping operations are efficient and effective with the capabilities and support needed to address the complex challenges they face in the world's trouble spots.

Distinguished Delegates,

Before concluding, I would like to take this opportunity to raise the critical funding shortfall affecting the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The \$74 million funding gap is seriously threatening UNRWA's ability to continue its work and provide relief to Palestine refugees.

I urge all Member States to respond generously and expeditiously to the Agency's efforts to secure the necessary funds.

In closing, I wish all of you every success in your deliberations this Session.

Please count on my steadfast support, and that of my team, as you look to conclude the important work of this Committee.

Thank you.