

6 October 2016

**71<sup>st</sup> session of the General Assembly**

**Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson,  
Joint Debate on Implementation of the resolutions of the United Nations [118]  
Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly [119]**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The American writer Mark Twain once observed that “continuous improvement is better than delayed perfection”.

It is a message of particular relevance to Member States in our ongoing efforts to revitalize the work of the General Assembly.

Since 1991, the UN membership has sought to enhance the role, authority, effectiveness, and efficiency of the General Assembly, through discussions under the agenda item “Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly”.

It is critical, incremental work that requires a deep commitment to the ideals of the United Nations, and a dedication to working to improve the organization’s ability to fulfil its Charter mandate.

Excellencies,

Over the 69th and 70th General Assembly sessions, two resolutions were adopted that each made significant strides in improving the work of this organization – resolutions 69/321 and 70/305.

Both of these resolutions were shepherded through by Ambassador Vladimir Drobnyak of Croatia, and Ambassador Wilfred Emvula of Namibia, I would like to thank them for their hard work and leadership as Co-Chairs of the ‘Ad Hoc Working Group on Revitalizing the work of the General Assembly’ that led to these outcomes.

The inclusion in 69/321 of details on the process to select and appoint the next UN Secretary-General have transformed and significantly enhanced the legitimacy of that process. The way in which the process was conducted has vindicated the good work done by the Ad-Hoc Working Group. I would like to pay tribute to all involved, in particular my predecessor, Mr Mogens Lykketoft.

Furthermore, the inclusion in resolution 70/305 of an oath of office, a code of ethics and a series of other measures relating to the President of the General Assembly were particularly prescient developments, and I am honoured to be the first President of the General Assembly to begin their term by undertaking to fulfil the commitments embedded in these documents, as well as to fostering a General Assembly based on ethics, transparency, inclusiveness and effectiveness.

Excellencies,

As milestones in the Revitalization agenda, resolutions 69/321 and 70/305 have already impacted on the work of this Assembly in significant ways, and I would like to touch briefly upon some of these key developments.

The importance of close cooperation and coordination between the Presidents of the General Assembly, Security Council and ECOSOC, as well as with the Secretary-General, was emphasized in resolution 70/305.

This is an essential development for the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations, particularly as it gears itself up for the task of supporting implementation of the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

I am deeply committed to doing my part to implementing these provisions. To strengthen transparency, and improve coherence across the work of the UN system, I have undertaken to inform Member States of each of my monthly meetings with the President of the Security Council and ECOSOC, as well as with the Secretary-General, and of the scope of each of these discussions.

General Assembly thematic debates continue to be an important mechanism for Member States to discuss issues of critical importance to the membership.

I have, however, heard clearly the concerns expressed by many delegations at the proliferation of such debates – mandated or otherwise – over recent years. I therefore plan, during the 71st Session, to minimize the number of such events and to look at creative ways to ensure that the pressing issues of the day are able to be considered by Member States and other stakeholders in a most effective and efficient way.

The decision to move the timing of elections for non-permanent members of the Security Council, to around six months prior to elected members commencing their roles, was implemented for the first time earlier this year, and is a practice that has already been commended by those recently elected members as a positive development that will help to facilitate their smooth assumption of responsibilities.

On working methods, I intend to continue my close cooperation with the Chairs of the main committees to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the work of the committees, as well as to enhance synergy and coherence, and reduce potential overlap, in the agendas of the General Assembly and its main committees, ECOSOC, and other related forums, particularly in light of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.

On this, I acknowledge that significant work was undertaken during the last session on the alignment of the General Assembly agenda with the 2030 Agenda – a process led ably by Ambassador Maria Emma Meija of Colombia, and supported by the Chairs of the First and Second Committees, and President of ECOSOC.

And I look forward to discussing with Member States ways to build on these efforts over the coming Session.

On the UN General Assembly itself, I will be encouraging the incoming Chairs of the Ad-Hoc Working Group to consider ways to strengthen its integrity.

In my view, this includes exploring ways to preserve decorum and the special place of the General Debate on the calendar of world leaders and to further improve the overall preparation for and effectiveness of high-level week.

For example, the wisdom of burdening ourselves with four official high-level meetings in the course of the General Debate is something that deserves serious consideration.

In addition, I would like to extend the focus that was placed on ethics during the 70th session to that of the overall decision-making processes, including in terms of the ethical dimension of elections for positions and roles at the UN.

On the selection and appointment of the next UN Secretary-General recent developments have already received significant attention and will continue to be high on the agenda during the 71st Session.

Over the coming days, I look forward to bringing the appointment process to an orderly conclusion, and to facilitating a smooth transition and a strong start for the next UN Secretary-General. This includes by promptly bringing Member States and the Secretary-General-designate together to enable the opportunity to engage in substantive dialogue on issues such as the appointment of senior officials or on the reform of the Secretariat.

Throughout this process, two Special Advisers from my Office, who I have tasked with engaging in consultations with Member States and interested groups, will be advising me on the best way forward.

Following finalization of the selection and appointment process for the next Secretary-General, there will be many lessons to be learned and considered by the Ad-Hoc Working Group.

Resolutions 69/321 and 70/305 provide solid ground for future deliberations to enhance the process, including on ways to strengthen the role of the General Assembly, and to enhance transparency and accountability of the process.

Finally, efforts to strengthen the accountability, transparency, and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, are already enhancing the functioning of the PGA's Office.

In addition to the oath of office and the code of ethics, as part of my commitment to transparency, I have undertaken to ensure that all financial support to the Office will be channeled through the UN Trust Fund, where all sources of funds and expenditures will be subjected to public scrutiny.

I also intend to ensure that at the end of the 71st Session tenure, the records and institutional memory of the PGA's Office will be preserved by the UN record-keeping and archiving facilities, and that a handover summary of best practices and lessons learned will be made available to all Member States.

I am acutely aware of the importance of a smooth transition between General Assembly Presidencies, and that calendar arrangements and other factors can make this difficult. Amongst other issues, we therefore need to look carefully at the timing of the transition in order to enable the incoming PGA enough time in office to ensure that high-level week runs as efficiently as possible.

I look forward to discussing ways to improve continuity and transitions further with the Ad-Hoc Working Group, in due course.

I would also once again like to thank Member States, the UN Secretariat – particularly DGACM, and UN specialized agencies, funds and programs for their support to the Office of the President of the General Assembly, including through secondments of staff.

Excellencies,

There is much important work that lies ahead for all of us in our efforts to strengthen and revitalize the General Assembly, and to ensure its role as the pre-eminent deliberative, policymaking, and representative organ of the United Nations.

The General Assembly's central role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is paramount, and we need to ensure that we too are essentially fit-for-purpose.

I am currently looking to appoint Co-chairs of the Ad-Hoc Working Group, in order to enable it to continue its important work during the 71st Session. I look forward to your continued active contribution to this process.

Thank you.