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**Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Annual High-Level Panel Discussion on Human Rights Mainstreaming**

Your Excellency, the President of the Human Rights Council,
Your Excellency, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you for today's discussion to address the critical role of human rights in achieving one of the principal objectives of the United Nations – the maintenance of international peace and security.

As you know, when world leaders came together seventy-two years ago to forge the Charter of the United Nations, they committed to saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to taking 'collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace'.

Article I of the Charter clearly demonstrated at the time that the maintenance of peace and security requires a commitment to preventing the outbreak of conflicts in the first place.

We have watched with dismay in the intervening seven decades, as the array of threats to international peace and security has mushroomed, with ever more lethal forms of warfare, the proliferation of terrorism and asymmetrical warfare, and spreading abuse of human rights in armed conflicts as a weapon of war.

Over the decades, the United Nations system has kept diligently to its central purpose of maintaining peace, with a mixed record of success and failure. To err is human, but who can doubt that without the work of the United Nations, our history would have been far more deeply scarred.

Nevertheless, we must face some profoundly unpleasant realities. As we meet, conflicts taking place around our world are estimated to be impacting hundreds of millions of people. They are driving mass displacement of people, leading to the largest humanitarian and refugee crisis since World War II.

Recurrent cycles of conflict mean that 95 per cent of refugees and internally displaced persons in developing countries have been affected by the same 10 conflicts since 1991. This fact alone suggests the United Nations traditional approach to peace and security and post-conflict peacebuilding has not been working.

Responding to the seriousness of the situation, last April the General Assembly and the Security Council adopted identical resolutions establishing, for the first time at the United Nations, the concept of ‘sustaining peace’.

These resolutions recognized the fundamental interconnectivity between peace, sustainable development, and human rights, the importance of conflict prevention to peacebuilding efforts, and the need for organizational reform within the UN system to ensure that we are able to bring a comprehensive and integrated approach to sustaining peace.

To be true to this new ethos of sustaining peace, United Nations peacebuilding efforts will require greater focus on dialogue and cooperation among all relevant stakeholders, including across Governments, the United Nations system, civil society, and the private sector.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

In order for the new approach of ‘sustaining peace’ to succeed, it is critical that it becomes an integral part of the methodology by which all United Nations activities are pursued.

In this regard, the UN’s human rights architecture has a pivotal role to play.

Indeed, during the High-level Dialogue that I convened in New York on 24 January on the topic of “Building Sustainable Peace for All”, in agreeing that there can be no sustainable development without sustaining peace, and no sustainable peace without sustainable development, speaker after speaker affirmed the central importance of human rights to peace and development.

The event – which uniquely brought together the President of the Security Council, the President of ECOSOC, the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, and the Secretary-General – featured three dedicated workshops, addressing the interrelationship of sustainable peace and development to empowerment of women and youth; the management of natural resources; and the strengthening of transparent, inclusive, and accountable institutions.

Throughout each of these workshops, the importance of promoting and protecting human rights was raised, in particular as a driver for building peaceful and inclusive societies, addressing social and economic inequality, increasing shared prosperity for all, and creating an enabling environment for all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

During the event, Secretary-General Guterres laid out his roadmap for reforming the United Nations system to ensure that it is coherent and coordinated, and better positioned to prevent conflict, protect human rights, and sustain peace.

Arising from the High-Level Dialogue, there are several points I would like to emphasize today. As part of the system-wide efforts to strengthen the UN’s peacebuilding, conflict prevention and sustaining peace work, it is clear that the United Nations human rights mechanisms, including those under Human Rights Council, will have a critical role to play.

This includes by:

One, drawing attention to imminent threats of human rights violations as an early indicator of potential conflict;

Two, helping to strengthen domestic human rights protections through capacity-building and knowledge sharing;

Three, ensuring accountability for human rights violations, as both a matter of justice and as deterrent for potential perpetrators;

Four, by using mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review, to monitor the implementation of human rights recommendations that can help to sustain peace;

And finally, five, ensuring that the expertise of the Human Rights Council is mainstreamed throughout the United Nations system, breaking down ‘silos’ within the UN system, and overcoming any fragmentation of approach across the three pillars, or indeed between Geneva and New York.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

As the United Nations and its Member States move to implement the drive towards sustaining peace, it is essential that we advance with common purpose. We must work shoulder to shoulder with key stakeholders across Government, the UN system, and civil society and with those laboring on human rights, peace, and sustainable development in this our great collective effort to better our world.

Initiatives such as this panel discussion are most laudable. They are essential to the process of bridging remaining divides in understanding and operational approaches.

Just as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda recognizes human rights as a cornerstone for sustainable development, so too does the concept of sustaining peace. So, I urge you all to bring forward your best ideas, your well-honed skills and your most determined will to defend the place of human rights in the drive to implement sustainable development and sustaining peace in these challenging times.

I thank you.