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71st session of the General Assembly

Opening remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson, Joint Debate on New Partnership for Africa's Development

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

Throughout this year's Africa Week, we have joined in celebrating Africa's progress in sustainable development, human rights, and the promotion of sustainable peace and security on the continent.

We have also discussed how the international community can help to address persistent challenges, so that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Climate Agreement, and the African Union Agenda 2063, can be realized.

Fundamental to these discussions has been a focus on stronger strategic and operational partnerships, and in this context, it is imperative that we consider the preeminent and long-standing framework for development in Africa, the 'New Partnership for Africa's Development' (NEPAD).

As a comprehensive, integrated and strategic framework for socio-economic development in Africa, NEPAD aims to promote Africa-wide policies for growth by addressing priority areas, including macroeconomic policy, conflict prevention and resolution, the promotion of democracy and human rights, infrastructure and agricultural development, strengthening regulatory frameworks, providing education and training, and empowering women and girls.

The critical need for all stakeholders to take a coordinated approach to sustainable development is paramount, and I commend the African Union's decision to align its Agenda 2063 with the 2030 Agenda.

The efforts by so many African countries to begin structuring their national development frameworks around the provisions of the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Climate Agreement, and Agenda 2063, deserves particular commendation.

In this regard, it is also encouraging that as part of ongoing efforts to implement the objectives of NEPAD within Africa, the NEPAD Agency has been tasked with fast-tracking implementation and monitoring of major Africa-wide development programmes and frameworks, including the 2063 Agenda, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Excellencies,

In the 15 years since the adoption of NEPAD, Africa has experienced unprecedented economic growth, and progress in building major infrastructure, strengthening regional and national health system, improving gender mainstreaming, and working towards climate mitigation and adaptation in agriculture.

While Africa's growth remains strong, unfavorable global economic conditions, including trade and financing, volatile commodity prices, limited economic diversification, and high levels of debt, risk undermining hard-fought developments gains.

Tackling these issues will require sustained efforts by both African countries and developments partners – including the UN system – to strengthen capacity-building, and increase investment in infrastructure, health services, regulatory reform, agricultural productivity, and access to education.

The efforts by African countries to pursue a Continental Free Trade Area to strengthen intra-African trade and economic integration, is a worthy pursuit.

So too is enhanced international support to African countries, for debt relief and sustainability, foreign direct investment and combat illicit capital flows, access to international markets, and technology transfer.

South-South, as a complement to the North-South and triangular cooperation, also remains an important tool for boosting economic growth and integration among African countries and should be enhanced.

Excellencies,

One of the primary objectives of NEPAD is the empowerment of women and girls, in order to unlock their full potential in political and economic life.

In this regard, I commend the African Union's decision to declare 2015 the 'Year of Women's Empowerment and Development' and 2016 the "African Year of Human Rights", with a particular focus on the rights of women.

However, despite these and other initiatives, numerous challenges continue to hinder progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa, and which is in turn impeding overall development and economic outcomes. In sub-Saharan Africa, gender inequality is estimated to be costing \$US95 billion a year.

Specific programmes to strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment, promote their access to education and training, and pursue the full realization of their rights, should therefore be prioritized as part of comprehensive efforts to drive sustainable development.

Excellencies,

The United Nations has been a steadfast partner in Africa's efforts to achievement sustainable peace and development.

I congratulate the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa for its work in coordinating UN-system wide support for NEPAD and the broader 2030 Agenda. This includes by raising awareness of Africa's development needs and advocating for stronger partnerships to complement national and regional level development efforts, including with civil society and the private sector.

The urgent need to strengthen global efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda is why we have made the principle objective of the 71st Session of the General Assembly to drive a universal push in implementing all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Through our SDG Implementation Strategy, we will push implementation by providing sustained engagement to previously mandated SDG events and processes, including the Habitat III Conference in Quito next week, the COP22 in Marrakech in November, and the Oceans Conference on SDG 14 in New York in June. We will be supporting existing efforts within and outside of the UN system to drive strategic partnerships – a track which complements NEPAD's overarching goals and framework.

And finally, we will be backing a series of signature events that will lay the foundation for sustained implementation in key areas, including raising global awareness of the SDGs – particularly among young people, and which will help to promote youth development and engagement, which in Africa, will help to harness the demographic dividend.

I will also be pushing opportunities to secure better financing for sustainable development; to promote sustainable peace; to empower women and girls; to tackle poverty and inequality; and to advance protection of our oceans, environment, and planet.

Excellencies,

I would also like to take this opportunity to address our global efforts to combat malaria, particularly in Africa.

In the five years since the Global Decade to Roll Back Malaria, the World Health Organization estimates that up to 3.2 billion people – nearly half of the world's population – remain at risk of contracting malaria.

As a preventable and treatable mosquito-borne disease, it is critical that we intensify our efforts to combat it.

In this regard, I commend the decision of African countries to extend, from 2016 to 2020, the African Union's 'Road Map on Shared Responsibility and Global Solidarity for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Response in Africa'.

Excellencies,

As we embark upon a new and ambitious chapter of implementing the sustainable development framework, let us all join forces to reinvigorate our commitment to real partnerships, that will fully realize the goals of NEPAD in Africa, that will eradicate malaria once and for all, and that will achieve each and every one of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

I thank you.