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**Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson,
International Day of Non-Violence**

Your Excellency, Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations,

Your Excellency, Deputy-Secretary-General Jan Eliasson,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Namaste

One month ago, I had the honour of entering the sacred compound of the Raj Ghat in Delhi to pay reverence to the memory of Mahatma Gandhiji. I circled the black marble slab, topped with its intricate display of flower petals, marking the place of cremation, and stood by the eternal flame, contemplating the eternal essence of the great one's central message of non-violence.

Today I have the honour of addressing you all, here at the United Nations, as we gather to commemorate the International Day of Non-Violence. And in doing so to also mark the anniversary of the birth of one of humanity's greatest moral, spiritual and political leaders.

Excellencies,

We live in a world in desperate need of the Mahatma's message of love and kindness, compassion and understanding. Every day we are confronted with the news of deadly conflicts and humanitarian disasters, and the scale of these challenges is daunting.

It is not too much to say that the consequences of Climate Change may threaten humanity's very survival. Sea levels are inexorably rising, desertification is spreading, and extreme weather events are becoming the norm. Our beloved Ocean is caught in a cycle of decline. We are currently living through the worst humanitarian and refugee crisis since the Second World War. Hundreds of millions of people continue to suffer from extreme poverty, and in many parts of the world inequality is widening, human rights are eroding, and xenophobia is on the march.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We go down in such times to the rivers of hope, on whose banks we replenish moral strength and our resolve to stand for what humankind has always craved: peace, equity, and a loving world. Above the

meandering course of the Yamuna river, we find solace in Gandhiji's abiding message; not just the enduring power of humble non-violence in the face of oppression, a power for good that can and has so many times changed the course of the world; but also his admonitions carved in the stone of conscience against the sins of politics without principles, wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, and knowledge without character.

We can find hope in Colombia. Just last week, I was in the beautiful city of Cartagena to witness the signing of the Peace Agreement bringing to an end 52 years of dreadful armed conflict. Let us pray for the success of the Colombian plebiscite being held today.

We found hope here in this great building two weeks ago. I was presiding over the United Nations General Assembly when world leaders unanimously adopted the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, collectively committing to find humane global solutions to address the plight of refugees, internally displaced persons, and migrants across our world.

And just one year ago, world leaders came together here and agreed upon the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and then a few months later adopted the historic Climate Agreement in Paris. These were giant, tangible steps towards a better world.

I see the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda as the masterplan for transforming our world into a sustainable place for our grandchildren and those who come after them. One need think only of Climate Change to appreciate just how high the stakes have become for securing their future. If we succeed in achieving the 2030 Agenda's seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, our grandchildren will live in a world in which extreme poverty has been eliminated, the challenges of Climate Change have been met, and people will be peacefully abiding in well-governed, sustainable societies in harmony with our planet's precious environment.

I believe Gandhiji would have applauded our efforts in putting the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals together, especially if one thinks of the goals relating to equity, healthy living and sustainable consumption patterns. As the Mahatma famously said, "There is a sufficiency in the world for man's need, but not for man's greed."

I also believe he would have been delighted today to learn of India's ratification of the Paris Climate Agreement, thus bringing its entry into force tantalizingly close. That this step, so full of hope and commitment, occurred on the anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi is especially fitting, given the Mahatma's enduring ethical messages of humanism, environmentalism, and pacifism.

Excellencies,

Gandhiji took objection to violence because as he put it, "When it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent." So, I close my remarks this morning with a rededication to the securing of a culture of peace, tolerance and understanding in the world. Their dark opposites of war, intolerance and lack of understanding abound all around, but on this day, we take strength from the

Gandhian principles of respecting our differences, responding with compassion, loving our environment, and always choose peace over conflict.

Omnia vincit amor, love conquers all; this I know to be true.

I thank you.