

19 September 2016

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

**Opening remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson  
Opening Session of High-level Plenary Meeting to address  
large Movement of Refugees and Migrants**

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,  
Secretary-General Ban-ki Moon,  
Mogens Lykketoft, President of the Seventieth Session,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are witnessing the worst humanitarian and refugee crisis since the Second World War.

Millions are fleeing armed conflict and the brutal effects of war.

Others are escaping violence, persecution, and systematic violations of their human rights.

Some are uprooting their lives in response to the adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters.

And others still are in search of opportunity and a better life for their children.

Over half of the world's refugees are children, most of whom are unable to access education.

Women and girls on the move are particularly vulnerable, often suffering the compounding effects of physical insecurity, multiple forms of discrimination, and a lack of access to basic services.

I have been horrified that so many desperate people in search of refuge, security, and opportunity, have been met by hostility and hateful rhetoric. Hopefully, the Secretary-General's new campaign to counter xenophobia will help to overcome this negativity.

I urge all people to recognize the positive contribution that migrants make to countries in which they settle.

Today's adoption of the New York Declaration marks an important step forward and reflects our collective commitment to address this global challenge.

I urge all Member States to swiftly implement their commitments under the Declaration.

This time last year, the historic 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted, ushering in a new transformative framework for our world.

Through our collective pledge to ‘leave no one behind’, we undertook to ensure that development gains will reach our most vulnerable.

In this context, we must ensure the needs of refugees and migrants are not overlooked.

The principle objective of the 71st Session of the General Assembly is a universal push towards implementing all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals,

Implemented effectively, the 2030 Agenda will eliminate extreme poverty, sustain peace, increase local opportunity, combat climate change and address many of the root causes driving people from their homes.

During the 71st Session, I will take forward the commitment of the membership under the New York Declaration to begin a process leading to a Global Compact on Migration, as well as a Global Compact on Refugees.

I will also begin to engage with you all on preparations for a successful Intergovernmental Conference on International Migration in 2018.

I urge Member States to maintain their high levels of ambition throughout these processes, and to always reach for the higher ground on the basis of our common humanity, and our values of decency and equality.

The wellbeing of millions rests with us at the United Nations, and we must not fail them in their hour of need.

I thank you.