

23 January 2017

71st session of the General Assembly

Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson, Brainstorming Session on Responsible Governance on Disarmament and Non- Proliferation for Progress and Sustainable Development

Your Excellency Mr. Rybakov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Belarus,
Your Excellency Mr. Ashikbayev, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you here today.

At the outset let me thank the Permanent Missions of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Suriname and the UN Development Programme for convening this event.

I particularly welcome the innovative nature of this event, in bringing together key partners to discuss their different areas of interdisciplinary expertise, and to brainstorm new ways of working together in order to drive a universal push for sustainable development.

It is this type of thinking that is needed if we are to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and transform our world to one where we eliminate extreme poverty, empower women and girls, increase prosperity, combat climate change, protect and sustainably use our natural environment.

Indeed, Sustainable Development Goal 16 specifically recognizes the importance of reducing illicit financial and arms flows, promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, strengthening the rule of law, and reducing violence and related deaths, to achieving sustainable development.

As Governments and partners look to turn the 2030 Agenda into action, sustainable financing has been identified as a fundamental issue to driving implementation on the scale necessary for the SDGs to be reached in the next 14 years.

And with current estimates suggesting SDG implementation will require annual investments of between US\$5 and 7 trillion per annum, it is critical that we tap into all sources of available finance, including by increasing investments from new sources, and redirecting existing financing towards sustainable development.

Reducing military spending and redirecting it towards sustainable development should be amongst our priority objectives, in line with Article 26 of the UN Charter, which calls for the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources.

With global military spending currently standing at over \$1.7 trillion annually, the reprioritization of these funds towards sustainable development could profoundly contribute to shifting our world towards a path of sustainability.

Excellencies,

In order to have a meaningful discussion on the relationship between disarmament and sustainable development, we must ask why it is that so many nations invest so heavily in weapons that fuel violence and conflict, inflict human suffering, destroy homes and infrastructure, facilitate terrorism, weaken economies, set back development outcomes, and risk undermining political stability.

As new threats multiply across our world, new challenges emerge to the independence and sovereignty of States, with commensurate acquisition of weapons.

It is therefore necessary, that we look beyond military spending as the best means to enhance security and stability, and see social and economic development, and political empowerment as a more effective way.

And it is also critical that we work at national, regional, and global levels to enhance peaceful relations between States, invest in conflict prevention, prioritize diplomatic and political solutions, and commit to sustaining peace.

In recent months, United Nations' Member States have taken a new approach to peace and security, through the concept of 'sustaining peace'. This fresh approach recognizes that it is not possible to achieve lasting peace without inclusive sustainable development, equitable economic opportunity, and human rights protections for all.

In recognition of the fundamental interlinkages between implementing the 2030 Agenda and the concept of Sustaining Peace, as you have heard, tomorrow I will be convening a High-Level Dialogue on "Building Sustainable Peace for All: Synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustaining Peace Agenda".

This event will mark the first time that the Secretary-General, the Presidents of the General Assembly, Security Council and ECOSOC, as well as the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, have participated in such an event together. We aim to improve coherence and coordination across these bodies.

I encourage you all to attend.

Excellencies,

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr whose life we celebrated just a few days ago said – and I quote – “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom”.

These are prophetic words in our modern age.

If we are to achieve our goals of peace, sustainable development, and human rights, we must rebalance our priorities and shift military spending towards investments in our people, our planet and in driving prosperity for all.

I wish you all a successful discussion today and look forward to the outcome of this brainstorming session feeding into tomorrow’s High-Level Dialogue, thereby strengthening the discourse on universal implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and achieving sustainable peace.