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Remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson, Retreat on Security Council Reform

Your Excellency Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, thank you to the Government of Qatar for hosting this retreat, and for the hospitality extended to me and my colleagues here. This event joins an illustrious list of high-minded contributions the State of Qatar has made in the best interests of the multilateral relations of the community of nations.

Excellencies,

It is self-evident that the world has changed dramatically since the United Nations was founded 71 years ago. The number of UN Member States has quadrupled, the global population has more than tripled, and we have seen unprecedented economic growth and technological advancements.

Of course, with this progress, new global challenges have emerged, including climate change, environmental degradation, widening inequality, and threats to international peace and security on a scale that we have not seen before.

The spread of terrorism, violent extremism, and asymmetrical warfare are posing new threats, while radicalization and xenophobia are on the rise, as people retreat to nationalist impulses in the face of a rapidly changing world.

At the same time, the worst humanitarian and refugee crisis since the Second World War is currently taking place, challenging the capacity of the United Nations to respond.

Put simply, the United Nations has never been under greater public scrutiny, nor have so many demands been placed upon it. This is not a time for faint hearts, nor is it a time when we should stray from the principles and purposes of our Charter.

The ability of the United Nations to find multilateral solutions to address the major global challenges of our time remains strong, as evidenced by the recent adoptions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Further, the capacity of our Organization to undertake significant reform was witnessed last year in the selection process for the new Secretary-General.

But as the world's central global institution founded to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war', the United Nations is most often assessed on its capacity to maintain international peace and security.

For many people around the world, the perceived inability of the Security Council to prevent conflict and address the scale of human suffering – I can refer here to Syria – has left them questioning the effectiveness of the United Nations.

The effective functioning of the Security Council is therefore fundamental to the credibility of the entire institution.

Indeed, given the interconnected nature of peace and security, sustainable development, and human rights, the UN's ability to sustain peace inescapably impacts on our ability to reach the Sustainable Development Goal.

Ensuring that the Security Council is representative, responsive, effective, and efficient is a well-founded priority for all Member States.

Reform is clearly needed.

But this requires all delegations to move past their well-known positions, and to approach Security Council reform with a renewed spirit of flexibility and commitment to finding common ground.

The energy and enthusiasm that has come with the commencement of the new Secretary-General's term offers us an important window for action that we must not squander.

To this end, I have appointed Ambassadors Mohamed Khaled Khiari of Tunisia, and Ion Jinga of Romania, as co-chairs of the Intergovernmental Negotiations during the 71st Session of the General Assembly. Both of them are seasoned diplomats, well respected by their colleagues and they are here at the retreat to listen to your good advice. I am confident that they will steer the IGN with great skill.

The success of their work this year will depend on the willingness of all delegations to engage in open and honest dialogue, bring and receive new ideas, demonstrate flexibility, and work together to find new areas of convergence.

Nationally-led initiatives outside the IGN framework – such as this retreat – are very helpful in facilitating candid discussions, promoting mutual understanding, and arriving at creative solutions. I therefore encourage all participants to maximize the opportunity of this retreat, and once again, on behalf of you all, thank the State of Qatar for giving us this opportunity to progress.

Excellencies,

The complexities and sensitivity of Security Council reform issues are evident to us all. However, changing global dynamics mean it is now more important than ever for the United Nations to progress reform efforts, and to demonstrate the ongoing centrality of the importance of the Organization in responding to the great challenges of our time.

I thank you.