

20 October 2016

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

**Address by H.E. Peter Thomson,  
Formal Session of the Third Committee**

Ambassador Mejia, Permanent Representative of Colombia,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address the Third Committee today. Let me begin by congratulating Ambassador Mejia on her election as Chair of this Committee, and for the leadership she has already provided to its work.

Congratulations also to the members of the Bureau. I wish you all the best in your efforts to support and steer the work of this Committee to a successful conclusion.

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly in 1948, the promotion and protection of human rights has advanced considerably across our world.

Just two days ago, the General Assembly commemorated this progress when we marked the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The sophisticated global human rights framework that has evolved since is the result of decades of dedication and perseverance from committed human rights defenders – from within Governments, the UN system, civil society and academia.

It is a framework that reflects the fundamental principles of the universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of human rights, and includes not only commitments of principle, but binding instruments, monitoring bodies, and mechanisms that provide remedies for violations.

Indeed, just last year, the universal and ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted and was explicitly grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But despite the great progress that we have made, it is clear far more needs to be done to ensure that the human rights of each and every person are upheld.

For many people across our world, their daily reality is one of an encroachment on their most fundamental human rights, rather than an expansion.

Millions of people are fleeing armed conflict, violence, intolerance, and systematic persecution, which is threatening their lives, livelihoods, security, and rights.

Just yesterday, I convened an informal briefing of the General Assembly, to hear from the UN system about the scale of the tragedy that is taking place in Syria, and which is having a devastating impact on the Syrian people and their country, with reverberations being felt across region and the rest of the world.

Regrettably, gross human rights violations that drive people from their homes are not isolated instances in our world.

As we meet, a humanitarian and refugee crisis is unfolding on a scale we have not seen since the Second World War.

Tragically, it includes people, families, and entire communities, who are being forcibly displaced by the destructive impacts of climate change and natural disasters – a situation that is only expected to deteriorate in coming years.

The impact of climate change on people is not only a security, development, and environmental issue. It is also a human rights concern.

In September, as part of the global commitment to address the refugee and migration crisis, Member States adopted the ‘New York Declaration’. It was an important first step.

During the 71st Session, my office will be following up the Declaration as a priority, by announcing shortly co-facilitators to begin negotiations on a modalities resolution that will lead to the adoption, in 2018, of a Migration Compact, and a Refugees Compact.

Distinguished Delegates,

As the General Assembly’s repository of human rights expertise, the work of this Committee could not be more fundamental to our efforts to uphold existing human rights standards; to protect the human rights of each and every individual; and to ensure that the human rights dimensions of new and emerging challenges are elevated and understood.

This includes your work to promote the rights of our most vulnerable and marginalized people, including children and youth, older persons, indigenous persons, racial and religious minorities, and persons with disabilities.

It includes your work to ensure gender equality, women and girls’ empowerment, and the full realization of all human rights for all women and girls.

It includes your work to address crime prevention and criminal justice issues, to address the world drug problem, and promote human rights institutions.

It includes your work to shine a light on areas where restrictions are tightening on civil and political rights, including on freedom of expression, the protection of journalists, and extrajudicial executions.

And it includes your work to advance critical social and economic issues, including the right to development, and to self-determination, as well as to social justice, and equality.

In this regard, I commend the growing collaboration between human rights experts in New York and Geneva – not least through this Committee and the Human Rights Council.

Distinguished Delegates,

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted last year is a critical tool in our armory to realizing the human rights of all people.

The 2030 Agenda is premised on the fundamental recognition of human rights for all people and takes a comprehensive and integrated approach to sustainable development.

If implemented effectively, the 2030 Agenda will enable us to: build peaceful and inclusive societies; empower women and girls; tackle discrimination and inequality; end exploitation, trafficking and torture; promote the rule of law; eliminate extreme poverty; and combat climate change.

Achieving the SDGs requires that people’s human rights be promoted and protected, and effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda must be done in a manner that is consistent with the UN Charter, international treaties, and international law.

For this to occur, it is vital that people around the globe are aware of their human rights, understand the impact that they can have on their lives; and are empowered to speak out to seek the promotion and protection of their rights, within their communities, and with authorities.

Governments should adopt laws and policies that are in line with human rights principles and standards and ensure that these laws are rigorously upheld. They must also work to promote inclusivity in decision-making by facilitating the participation of women, and ensuring that the voices of young people, and vulnerable and marginalized groups, are heard.

Through the 2030 Agenda, we have the opportunity to drive a broad movement of actors and organizations at local, national and global levels, to advance a people-centered approach to realizing both universal human rights, and the SDGs.

Distinguished Delegates,

Last Session, a considerable amount of work was undertaken on the alignment of the General Assembly agenda with the 2030 Agenda. This process was ably led by Ambassador Maria Emma Meija and supported by the Chairs of the First, Second and Third Committees, and the President of the ECOSOC. It aimed to ensure that the overall work of the General Assembly – from the plenary to the main

committees – as well as the work of ECOSOC – contributes to the effective and efficient implementation of relevant frameworks.

There is a clear need to continue this comprehensive discussion. I will therefore take forward these discussions in the resumed session, and I look forward to your guidance and proposals in this regard.

Distinguished Delegates,

During this session, your discussions and deliberations will contribute directly to the achievement of one of the core purposes of the United Nations.

While we may at times have our differences, let us all remember that it is our very diversity that makes us stronger; that we all share a common humanity; and that no matter who we are in this world, that we all enjoy the same human rights, and that these must be protected.

It is, after all, not only the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do. As a world where every person's human rights are respected is one that is inherently safer, more just, and more stable.

I wish you all every success during this Session. Please count on my support, as well as that of my team, during your deliberations.

I thank you.