

25 October 2016

71st session of the General Assembly

**Opening remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson,
United Nations Staff Day**

Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
UN Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here to celebrate UN Staff Day, and to have the opportunity to express thanks to the nearly 76,000 women and men who are currently serving in the United Nations system. It is an appreciation that I know is shared by all the members of the General Assembly.

Former UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, once said “The health and strength of a community depends on every citizen’s feeling of solidarity with the other citizens, and on their willingness, in the name of this solidarity, to shoulder their part of the burdens and responsibilities of the community. The same is of course true of humanity as a whole.”

Across our world, United Nations’ staff members are working every day at UN Headquarters, duty stations, and field missions, to give life to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, “to shoulder their parts of the communal burden”.

Whether serving as a child protection adviser in a war zone, or a truck driver on a humanitarian mission; whether a peace and development specialist building partnerships, or a human resources officer making sure colleagues are supported in the field; every UN staff member rises each day to contribute to a purpose greater than themselves – that of service to the international community.

Across peace and security, development, and human rights, the responsibilities invested in the United Nations by the international community are immense. And it is UN staff members who are the engine that drives the work to fulfil these responsibilities.

The UN must uphold standards of professionalism and dedication to the principles of the UN Charter. I urge all staff members to work to secure the integrity of the UN in all aspects of their daily work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We remember and honour this day the more than 3,500 UN personnel who have lost their lives in service to the high ideals of this institution, over the course of the 71 years of its history. Their memories and their sacrifice live as long as the UN stands.

We also remember this day the more than 107,000 UN peacekeepers currently deployed in the trouble spots of the world. We give thanks to those UN staff members who are serving in the field under challenging and often dangerous circumstances, away from loved ones and the comforts of home.

Their willingness to risk safety, to take the blue flag of hope to people in need, brings great pride to their own nations and to the United Nations.

But it is also one that brings with it a heavy burden shared by both the deployed officers and their families. I therefore also want to recognize and thank the family members of UN Staff for their sacrifice and support.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ours is an Organization built upon shared purpose and common values, and I encourage you all to take the opportunity of UN Staff Day to reflect on both your individual and collective worth in the service of the United Nations.

Thank you for your service; thank you for choosing the United Nations and the betterment of people and planet as your vocation; thank you for your collegiality; and may you succeed in all your goals and efforts in the year ahead.

I thank you.