

Opening speech by the President of the General Assembly

Mogens Lykketoft

for the General Debate of the 70th session of General Assembly,

Monday 28th of September 2015

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Heads of states, heads of governments, distinguished ministers,

Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, delegates,

ladies and gentlemen, Friends

On Friday, You, the Heads of States and Governments, approved the 2030 Agenda.

A genuinely transformative decision – epic in its analysis and revolutionary in its ambition.

A decision that once again proved the universal relevance and value of the United Nations.

Now, we face the even more daunting task of transforming our vision into action.

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Our ambition will only be realized in a world of peace and security and respect for human rights - not in a world, where investment in armament and wars more and more absorb and destroy a huge share of the resources, we have committed to invest in sustainable development. Not in a world, where war, poverty, hunger, deep inequalities and poor governance are drivers of ever growing waves of refugees and uncontrolled human migration - and count heavily among causes of conflicts, which in turn affect and uproot many more people.

Governments will also only succeed in implementing this great agenda with the continued and expanding participation of all stakeholders - parliamentarians, leaders of regions, cities and local communities, civil society, youth, religious communities and trade unions, business and academia worldwide.

And the great goals of the United Nations will only be fulfilled when we realize that global interdependency is more pronounced than ever. So, too, is the urgency for joint global action.

With the Millennium Development Goals, we have over the last fifteen years cut the number of extremely poor people by half.

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With the Sustainable Development Goals, however, we acknowledge that eradicating poverty in all its forms is only possible with a much more complex transformation of the entire global economy, the environment and social structures.

We realize that we cannot rely only on the traditional growth model of the past fifteen – or the past seventy – years. Incredible and unsustainable inequality in income, wealth, access to resources and to quality education and health services must be overcome.

We underline – more vigorously than ever – that equal rights and opportunities for girls and women are crucial preconditions for a sustainable future everywhere.

We recognize that each and every person has a legitimate demand for a decent life. But that as the number of people on our planet has tripled in the last 70 years, we must meet this demand without further depleting the natural resources that we pass on to new generations.

We acknowledge also that people in developed countries cannot continue to consume and produce in the manner they are used to. And that billions of hardworking people elsewhere on their road to prosperity should not simply adopt the same behavior as that of today's rich countries.

To build a sustainable global infrastructure over the next fifteen years, trillions of dollars need to be best invested.

The least developed countries can only do this, when rich countries live up to their longstanding commitments of a minimum of 0.7 pct. of their national income in development assistance.

And national governments can only fund their share of the investment required by fighting corruption and building efficient tax systems. And a much stronger international cooperation must ensure that rich companies and individuals pay taxes where they earn their money – and are no longer able to evade payment in tax havens.

Finally we must realize that a huge share of the investment in a better future must come from private sources such as companies, capital investors and pension funds. Therefore it is crucial that governments create a framework for markets that makes green investment the obvious, safer and better investment - both for business and for the whole of mankind.

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Excellencies, it is due time for far reaching decisions to bring an end to devastating conflicts and to start investing big in sustainable development.

Action is needed NOW.

If we fail, we run the overwhelming risk of unmanageable and inescapable damage to the political, social, ecological and climate balance on our planet.

If we fail, the SDGs will never be reached, because the resources needed will be swallowed up in addressing crises and conflicts:

If we fail to stop climate change, the consequences will be catastrophic. Further hundreds of millions of people will be forced away from their habitats. Historically, migration has brought huge benefits to the global community. But large scale uncontrolled migrations have the potential to destabilize societies, leading to conflicts far more damaging than those we are not able to deal with in an orderly and humanitarian fashion today.

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Excellencies, we live in paradoxical and transformational times.

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Never before has such a large share of humanity enjoyed so good a life, yet never before have we been at greater risk of fundamentally disrupting the basic living conditions on our small globe.

And while a larger part of humanity lives in peace, and has done so for longer periods than earlier in human history, the follies of war and self-destruction have increased in the Middle East, in parts of Africa and once again in Europe, creating unfathomable humanitarian catastrophes and more refugees than at any time since the end of World War II.

Tensions between major powers increase, as do investments in all kinds of armaments. Vast arsenals of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons still exist, and disarmament negotiations in Geneva have been stalled for years.

Four weeks ago I visited Hiroshima and was, once again, confronted with the horrors of nuclear war. We must remember that all too many nuclear warheads are on high alert, and we have not even eliminated risks of nuclear conflicts by mistake. First of all – therefore – we need to rebuild confidence and scale back these risks.

Excellencies, we must – here in the United Nations, here in this very hall – make an extraordinary effort to break all the vicious circles. We must act in accordance with the agreed understanding behind the 2030 Agenda by

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recognizing the strong linkages between development, peace and security and respect for human rights. And take specific actions to make progress in each of these areas.

This will be the central focus of the 70th session of the General Assembly and my Presidency.

I will offer my strong support to new ideas on how to strengthen global peace and security; from the role of women, to conflict prevention, mediation and settlement, from the UN's peace operations to the overall peace-building architecture and Security Council reform.

It is my sincere hope that the UN will develop a more direct role in reconciliation and peace-building, including in conflicts where we have failed until now. And that we will move forward in our common efforts to prevent vicious radicalization and fight the evil of terrorism.

With parties living up to their promises, the nuclear agreement between Iran, all five permanent members of the Security Council, Germany and the European Union, can be a very important contribution to avoiding nuclear proliferation.

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Impatiently we await the day when major and regional powers also join forces to stop the senseless and horrifying bloodshed in and around Syria – and – in doing so - address the root causes of the refugee crisis.

I am sure we all wish that this day comes very soon – and want to contribute to such an outcome.

I am sure that member states – building on our great 2030 Agenda - will increase efforts to make human rights a reality for all people without discrimination - from fundamental rights such as safe access to food, clean water, quality health and education services and decent work, to civil and political rights such as freedom of expression and association; from the rights of migrants and indigenous peoples to those of women, children and persons with disabilities. We must also advance efforts to strengthen good governance and the rule of law.

As President of the General Assembly I will support member states in their ambitions for revitalization and reform – including a new, more transparent process for selection of the next Secretary General.

Excellencies, this 70th anniversary of the United Nations must be a defining year to confirm and invigorate the universal values that we – the peoples – agreed upon in the Charter.

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No one shall be left behind.

Because, as the Norwegian author Nordahl Grieg wrote: 'Noble is mankind,
the earth is rich. If there is need and hunger, it is by deceit'.

I thank you.
