Building Sustainable Peace for All:
Synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace

Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson,
President of the 71st Session of the General Assembly
Cairo Center for Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa,
Cairo, Egypt
1 April 2017

Your Excellencies Ambassador Hisham Badr, Ambassador Mounir Zahran, and Director Ashraf Swelam

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to begin by thanking the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, and the Cairo Centre for Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa, for organizing today’s luncheon, and for giving me the opportunity to speak to you on the topic of global importance –building sustainable peace for all.

I was greatly impressed by the presentation on the work of the Cairo Centre, particularly its work on the prevention of radicalization and extremism leading to terrorism. Together with my visit earlier to the Al-Azhar’s operations on counter-radicalization, particularly on social media, I can say there is a positive response to the call on the Islamic World to do more for the prevention of radicalization, and that Egypt is heeding that call.

Before continuing, I want to take a moment to thank Egypt for its long and illustrious history of engagement and support to the United Nations.
As I had the privilege of discussing with President al-Sisi this morning, since the time of the United Nations’ founding, Egypt has played a leading role in shaping the organisation we have today. Egypt has supported its functioning at Headquarters and in the field, and worked tirelessly towards the United Nations fulfilling its Charter’s aim of ‘saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war’.

Over the years, Egypt has deployed over 30,000 of its own troops to the far reaches of the world, as part of UN peacekeeping operations. Egyptian peacekeepers have lost their lives whilst serving under the UN flag, and it is a sacrifice for which we - the international community - remain eternally grateful.

Within the hallowed walls of the United Nations, Egypt is also widely-recognized for its comprehensive engagement on peace and security, as an ardent supporter of UN peacebuilding, in the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and, of course, as a current member of the UN Security Council.

One of Egypt’s greatest contributions to the United Nations was the outstanding service of Secretary-General Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the first Egyptian, Arab and African to be appointed as UN Secretary General. Dr. Boutros-Ghali’s passing last year was a great loss to the world, and I would like to reiterate my sincere condolences to the Government and the people of Egypt.

In many ways, Dr. Boutros-Ghali’s contributions to the United Nations presaged the topic we are discussing today - a concept that the international community is only now starting to fully understand – that sustaining peace and achieving sustainable development are two agendas that stand or fall together.

As far back as the early 1990s, Dr. Boutros-Ghali declared that “peace, the economy, the environment, society, and democracy”, were the ‘five
foundations of development.’ And through his ‘Agenda for Peace’ he pushed the importance of preventative diplomacy, peacemaking, and peacekeeping, to achieving peace. Indeed, in this 1992 ‘Agenda for Peace’, Dr. Boutros-Ghali said – and I quote – “Poverty, disease, famine, oppression and despair abound, joining to produce 17 million refugees, 20 million displaced persons and massive migrations of peoples within and beyond national borders.”

Excellencies,

When we look around our world today, we are faced with the challenge of 2 billion people living in countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence.

More than 65 million people have been internally displaced, and among them, over 21 million refugees – over half of whom are under the age of 18.

Perhaps, most disturbingly of all, when we look more closely at these figures, we find that 95 per cent of the refugees and IDPs in developing countries today have been affected by the same 10 conflicts since 1991.

Breaking these cycles of violent conflict and relapse are fundamental to our efforts to achieving sustainable development across our complex and rapidly-changing world.

The challenges before us are immense. From the highest number of simultaneous peace and security threats, to the largest refugee and humanitarian crisis since World War II; from the growing threat of terrorism, violent extremism and asymmetrical warfare, to social unrest arising from population growth and rising inequality; from large-scale environmental destruction, to the devastating impacts of climate change – we find ourselves combating forces which undermine the conditions for achieving sustainable peace, prosperity and development in our world.
One only need look to the catastrophic drought and famine currently affecting so many nations in Africa, to see how hard-won development gains can be reversed so quickly.

**Excellencies,**

Responding to these global challenges, last April the UN General Assembly and Security Council came together in a rare bicameral move to agree to a new approach to peace, through the adoption of the sustaining peace resolutions.

In many ways, the sustaining peace resolutions captured the central idea advanced by Dr. Boutros-Ghali in his ‘Agenda for Peace’ – namely that a comprehensive, cross-sectoral, and integrated approach is needed to advance international peace and security – one that recognizes the fundamental importance of sustainable development and human rights.

Indeed, just as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the importance of fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies to achieve each of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, the sustaining peace resolutions emphasize the importance of sustainable development to sustaining peace.

And just as the sustaining peace resolutions give special place to conflict prevention, gender equality, protecting human rights, and addressing the root causes of conflict, the 2030 Agenda advances an integrated and mutually-reinforcing approach to sustainable development.

Furthermore, the need for an integrated approach to peace and development is recognized within the Africa Union’s Agenda 2063, where both “growth and sustainable development” and a “peaceful and secure Africa” are amongst its key priorities for achieving the social and economic transformation of the Continent.
**Excellencies,**

With global attention now shifting to implementing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and with the UN Secretary-General Guterres looking to reform the United Nations to ensure that it is able to do more to prevent conflict and sustain peace, a new opportunity exists for the international community to bring an integrated, coherent and coordinated approach to our peace, development, human rights, and humanitarian efforts.

But making the best use of this opportunity requires us to pursue new ways of thinking, new ways of partnering, new ways of financing, and new ways of delivering on the ground.

With this in mind, on 24 January 2017, I convened a High-Level Event at UN Headquarters on the very topic that I am speaking on today – ‘Building Sustainable Peace for All: Synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace’.

During the discussion, speaker after speaker rose to reinforce the critical nexus between sustaining peace and sustainable development, affirming that “there can be no sustainable development without sustaining peace, and there can be no sustainable peace without sustainable development”.

They discussed ways to bring an integrated and inter-disciplinary approach to operationalizing sustaining peace and to achieving sustainable development.

This included by sharing views on how the UN system could take advantage of synergies to promote the effective implementation of both agendas.

A number of key themes emerged throughout the discussion.
Firstly, the importance of conflict prevention to create an enabling environment for sustainable development. This included the acknowledgement that the best means of preventing conflict is to address root causes and pursue sustainable development.

Secondly, the need for inclusivity in these efforts to ensure that we leave no one behind. The vital contributions of women and youth must be secured, not least through equitable access to education, opportunity, and employment, as well as constructive processes such as inter-faith dialogue.

Thirdly, the importance of strengthening of human rights protections, justice and rule of law, and of effective and accountable institutions to sustainable peace and development – not only to achieve SDG16, but also as a golden thread running through the implementation of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Fourthly, the need to pursue strategic partnerships that bring together key actors from across Government, the UN system, civil society, international financial institutions, the private sector, and of course regional organizations, so that their work is coordinated, complementary and mutually-reinforcing;

Finally, the importance of adequate and sustainable financing for peace and development efforts was emphasized by all.

Of course, to achieve all of this Member States have a critical role to play – through inclusive national ownership of peace and development processes, and through lending their political support to UN reform efforts so that the multilateral system has the tools it needs.
Excellencies

If we are to meet the 2030 Agenda's promise of a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world for all, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that development gains reach all of those people affected by conflict and fragility.

We must work to prevent countless millions more from having their lives and their livelihoods destroyed by conflict and violence.

And we must, as a community of nations, jointly act on the self-evident truth that there can be no sustainable development without sustaining peace and vice-versa.

I have no doubt that Egypt will continue to be a key leader in the achievement of this fundamental objective for the good of all humanity.

I thank you.