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71st session of the General Assembly

Opening Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson, High-Level GA Segment to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Your Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address the General Assembly as we meet to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development.

This anniversary comes at a critical juncture for humanity.

Next Sunday will mark one year since world leaders came together to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – a universal masterplan to transform our world, in order to save people and planet.

The agreement of Agenda 2030 is a testament to how far the international community has come in its understanding of and commitment to development.

In many ways, it was the Declaration on the Right to Development that laid the groundwork for the major agreements of 2015 – from Addis Ababa to New York and finally to Paris.

And as many of the SDGs are directly connected to the Right to Development and human rights in general, the SDGs full implementation will make a major contribution to the realization the Right to Development.

The challenges today are similar to those we faced when agreeing this Declaration 30 years ago – ensuring greater social justice, eliminating extreme poverty; reducing inequalities within and between countries, and putting both people and planet at the center of our development strategies and outcomes.

We are also seized today with the need to protect migrants and refugees, to foster inclusive and sustained economic growth, to distribute the benefits of globalization more fairly; to combat climate change, and to sustain peace.

The task ahead therefore is clear – to deliver on the Right to Development, including by delivering on the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

For this reason, I have made the principle objective of the 71st Session of the General Assembly, driving a universal push to see meaningful progress in implementing all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

This will require us to bring awareness of the SDGs into every school and every corner of the world, so that the SDGs are seen as individual rights and responsibilities.

It will also require concrete action to deliver on the commitments contained in the various means of implementation targets.

In fact, many of these commitments mirror duties arising from the Declaration on the Right to Development.

It includes a duty on each government to put the well-being of the entire population, and of all individuals, at the heart of their policies and strategies. This includes by ensuring their free and meaningful participation in development efforts and decision-making process, and in the distribution of the resulting benefits.

It includes the duty to remove structural obstacles and to address both historical and contemporary inequities that are holding back developing countries.

And it includes the need for international cooperation in support of those countries that remain in vulnerable situations – whether they be the least developed countries; those affected by conflict and instability; or those struggling to adapt to the impacts of climate changes.

As we mark this Anniversary, let us recognize that if we are to realize the Right to Development, we must do so together, working in responsible and ethical partnerships between governments, the UN system, civil society, the private sector and others.

Excellencies,

The Right to Development is as relevant today as it was thirty years ago.

As we look to implement the comprehensive and universal 2030 Agenda, it should be the foundation of our approach.

I look forward to working with all of you throughout this 71st session to building on that foundation and to delivering a universal push to transform our world.