

8 December 2016

71st session of the General Assembly

**Video Message by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Ninth Bali Democracy Forum: “Religion, Democracy and Pluralism”**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Greetings from New York, Om Swasti Astu

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Government of Indonesia for convening the 9th Bali Democracy Forum.

Since its inception in 2008, the Bali Democracy Forum has become the preeminent forum from promoting democratic values and strengthening a progressive democratic architecture in the Asia-Pacific.

I commend Indonesia on its leadership of the Bali Democracy Forum, and its commitment to advancing democratic principles throughout the region.

While commitments at the United Nations mean that am unable to join you in Bali in person today, I am grateful to the Government of Indonesia for the opportunity to address you all.

Just last year, world leaders came together to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is a framework that places democratic values at the center of global efforts to transform our world for people, planet, and prosperity.

The 2030 Agenda recognizes the fundamental importance of peaceful and inclusive societies, good governance, rule of law, accountable and transparent institutions, representative decision-making, and respect for human rights to sustainable development, in addition to poverty eradication, inclusive economic growth, gender equality and environmental protection.

These democratic principles are reflected as cross-cutting priorities throughout the 2030 Agenda, as well as in a standalone Sustainable Development Goal – SDG 16.

Implementation of 2030 Agenda should therefore be seen as a tool for realizing the purposes of the Bali Democracy Forum in the Asia-Pacific.

The theme of this year's Bali Democracy Forum "Religion, Democracy and Pluralism" could not be more relevant in today's rapidly changing world.

As we speak, terrorism, violent extremism, and asymmetrical warfare are on the rise and threatening international peace and security.

The worst humanitarian and refugee crisis since the Second World War is taking place, with millions of people fleeing armed conflict and persecution, the effects of climate change and natural disasters, or searching for opportunity and better lives.

Inequality within and between nations is greater today than it was thirty years ago. And in many countries long-standing human rights protections are being eroded.

Migration and urbanization are shifting the demographic landscapes of our countries. Radicalization and xenophobia is both on the rise, with far too many people turning to hateful philosophies in their search for a sense of security.

In our interconnected world, security threats, demographic shifts, and fear spread quickly, and can have global ramifications. It is therefore all of our responsibilities to promote and defend democratic ideals.

Open discussion of the contemporary challenges facing democracy is essential to our efforts, as is sharing experiences and best practices.

In the context of the discussion on religion, democracy and pluralism, I would like to emphasize three key complementary actions to fostering interreligious harmony in pluralistic societies.

Firstly, the human rights of all people must be respected.

Human rights, peace and security, and sustainable development, are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. As such, the promotion and protection of human rights – including religious freedom, freedom of expression, and gender equality – should be seen as fundamental to sustaining peace, progress, development, and growth.

Secondly, good governance, and building effective, accountable, and transparent institutions, must be prioritized.

Across the world, experience has shown that for democracy to take hold, long-term dedicated strategies are required to embed a culture of peace, democracy, civic plurality, and respect.

Building transparent national institutions that respond to the needs of the people is critical. So too is fostering understanding within societies of the importance of democratic values, including human rights, equality, justice, and inclusive decision-making.

Thirdly, dialogue between people of different backgrounds, faiths, cultures, creeds, and other differences, should be encouraged, to promote mutual understanding and respect, and foster peaceful coexistence.

Such actions complement a number of initiatives being advanced at the United Nations, including the Alliance of Civilizations, and Culture of Peace agenda, which promote interreligious dialogue, non-violence, and respect.

Excellencies,

If we are to realize the vision in the UN Charter of a world of peace and based on recognition of the inherent dignity, rights and worth of all people, we must all play our part – to promote and defend democracy, to practice mutual respect, and to coexist in peace.

I wish you well for a productive and successful Bali Democracy Forum.

Thank you. Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om.