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GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

President of the 71st session

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Keynote at 2017 Partnership Exchange

17 July 2017 in [Statements](#)

As delivered

Keynote address by H.E. Mr Peter Thomson, President of the 71st session of the General Assembly, at Opening Segment of 2017 Partnership Exchange

17 July 2017

Madam Chair,

Mr Wu Hongbo, Under Secretary General of UN DESA,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentleman,

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I would like to begin by saluting our organizers, UN DESA and the UN Office of Partnerships, for their insight and commitment in dedicating a full day of discussion to the kinds of partnerships we need to deliver the 2030 Agenda.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

In keeping with the theme of this meeting, I would like to make three assertions that I believe to be undeniable truths.

Firstly, ending extreme poverty and hunger by 2030 is possible.

Secondly, securing more equal, more peaceful and more prosperous societies by 2030 is possible.

And thirdly, recalibrating our economies, and indeed our values to avert the worst impacts of climate change and replenish our natural environment by 2030 is possible.

I believe these three transformational breakthroughs are possible because from all that I have observed, human-induced problems have human-devised solutions. And, more than ever in human history, we have the tools to get the job done.

To activate those tools, the essential ingredient is partnership. Throughout the 71st session, we have been focused on strengthening momentum for SDG implementation and time and again, we have witnessed the fact that no SDG can be solved by individual actors alone. Partnerships are and will be the primary movers.

Last month at The Ocean Conference, when around 6000 people descended upon the UN to turn the tide on the decline of Ocean's health, a spirit of partnership ruled the conference and was the crowning of its success.

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developing Pacific Island country, both dedicated to SDG14's implementation, both resolved to show the world that when it comes to saving the Ocean, we are all in this together. This was a good partnership at work.

One of the outstanding features of the conference was that almost 1400 voluntary commitments were made from active citizens; private companies and the scientific community; from governments, civil society and international organizations in support of SDG14. The way forward for these commitments is that they are being grouped into communities of interest, for example Ocean acidification, marine protected areas or coastal ecosystems, so that those involved can be convened and partnered in the interest of support and progress.

The Ocean Conference also showed that partnerships take many different forms. Partnerships can, for example, focus on the country level, on specific regions or indeed have a scope that is truly global. When we examine partnerships more broadly, we see they can be practical and field-oriented such as the planting of trees, delivering shelter, or securing safety for the displaced. Or they can focus on root causes, for example creating movements to tackle harmful gender norms, convening actors along value chains to address negative industry practices, or teaming up with likeminded actors to align global regulation with the SDGs.

Whatever their form, successful partnerships must build and foster trust. The experience of sustainable development shows many initiatives that failed due to a lack of consultation and collaboration. Partnerships have to be based on a clear understanding from the outset on what the delivery points are and who is carrying out the delivery.

Partnerships also require accountability and transparency so that no party is compromised. They must adhere to accepted standards of governance, ethics and financial practices.

I am sure that throughout our discussions today, we will hear plenty of examples of how best to generate that trust and accountability.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentleman,

Almost two years have passed since the historic breakthroughs of 2015, the Paris Climate Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This year's HLPF is witness to the fact that many of the foundations for transformative action are in place.

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Progress is patchy, with some areas better served than others. In addition to SDG14 Ocean action, initiatives to support SDG13 through implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement are plentiful, diverse and gaining momentum. And I note that over 70 of the initiatives announced at COP21 will have positive impact across the other SDGs.

In other areas there are major gaps. And there are also gaps in the tools and capacities available to the UN. This is one of the findings contained in the recently-released report of the Secretary-General on the reform of the UN Development System. I encourage all Member States to take heed of this finding and to support the Secretary-General in his pursuit of a more effective UN to deliver the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

To illustrate some of the current gaps, I will touch on just three items where a more capable UN in the area of partnerships, could reap significant dividends for SDG implementation.

The first is the area of financing – both public and private.

Public finance is the bedrock upon which the achievement of all 17 SDGs will be built. For developing countries, collaboration between donors, philanthropists, global tax authorities, researchers and development banks is crucial if we are to deliver services like social protection, health care, quality education and rural infrastructure. These are the services that will eradicate poverty, address gender inequality, and live up to our mantra of leaving no one behind.

It was encouraging to see that development assistance from OECD countries increased to highs of around 142 billion dollars in 2016, but it is also clear that we have yet to see the range of ambitious partnerships required to complete the unfinished business of the MDGs and generate the human capital that will drive productive economies. The UN played a key role in this space in the MDG era and I encourage you to reflect on how we recreate such momentum again in the SDG era.

Private finance, whether domestic or international, is also critical. It fuels the growth upon which shared prosperity can be built.

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These include: the creation of innovative risk-sharing initiatives; the alignment of environmental, social and governance reporting guidelines; the development of a solid pipeline of projects; and engagement with credit rating agencies so that they are fully abreast with the latest information relating to developing countries.

These steps will only be advanced through cross-sector collaboration, and the UN, with its unique convening power, has a critical role to play.

The second item where further collaborative action is needed is technology and innovation.

The challenges we face in reaching the most vulnerable, in reducing green-house gases, in spreading knowledge or in supporting better governance, will only become surmountable when technology and innovation are deployed at the scale required to fully support SDG implementation.

The potential connectivity of over 7 billion people, for example, will create never-seen-before opportunities to tap into the collective wisdom of the world. Significant intervention in areas like artificial intelligence and robotics also holds great potential for the SDGs.

To ensure these changes lead to SDG solutions, we need the key people at the table. Again, this is an area where a coherent UN with dynamic partnership capabilities, connecting the local to the global, could greatly enhance our Agenda 2030 prospects.

The last area I would like to highlight is that of global awareness. The 2030 Agenda is a new social contract for the world. As such, global consciousness must be raised to its contents, to its transformative message and to what I see as a set of individual rights and responsibilities that emerge from it.

The benefits are manifold. Active, engaged and responsible citizenry will bring unique solutions to the table. They can alter consumption patterns, and they can keep us all accountable to the promises made in September 2015. But first, they must have SDG awareness.

With strong initiatives from Project Everyone, SDG Action Campaign, and others, we are off to a good start. But it is obvious that more is needed to ensure everyone knows about the SDGs. The SDGs must go viral and be central to the considerations of young people, activists and businesses everywhere. Importantly, it is the logic of the SDG's that they must understand.

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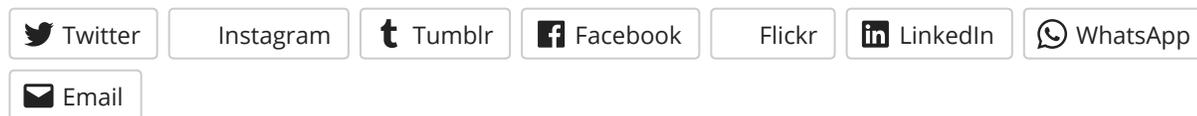
As I said at the outset, bringing about the transformative changes set out in the 2030 Agenda is within our communal abilities and capacities.

But effective collaboration and partnerships between governments, private sector, civil society, local authorities, schools, universities and our communities, has to be at the heart of our efforts if we are to succeed. It is well within our grasp for us to ensure the UN can fulfil it's potential in this area.

Let us therefore leave the HLPF this week committed all around to collaboration, openness, responsibility, innovation and determination to move forward in partnership.

I thank you for your attention.

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