

23 September 2016

71st session of the General Assembly

**Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Annual Ministerial Meeting on Countering Xenophobia
Through Fostering Inclusive Dialogue**

H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations,
H.E. Mr. José Manuel García-Margallo, Minister of Foreign Office, and Cooperation of Spain
H.E. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Foreign Minister of Turkey,
Ministers, High Representative, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you today at the UN Alliance of Civilizations Group of Friends Annual Ministerial Meeting.

The Alliance has become a leading platform at the UN for promoting intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation.

I would like to thank High Representative H.E. Mr. Al-Nasser for his tireless leadership of the Alliance.

I would also like to thank the co-Sponsors of the Alliance, Turkey and Spain, and Members of the Group of Friends for their continued support.

Excellencies,

The world is witnessing the worst humanitarian and refugee crisis since the Second World War.

Millions are on the move – many fleeing armed conflict, violence, and persecution, along with the adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters.

At a time when empathy, compassion, collaboration, and partnership are needed more than ever to address this global crisis, we are instead witnessing a rise in xenophobia, racism, hate speech, and attacks on people's human rights and fundamental freedoms.

At the General Assembly's High-Level Meeting on 19 September, Member States took an important collective step towards addressing the global refugee and migrant crisis, adopting the historic New York Declaration.

Through the Declaration, Member States not only reaffirmed their commitment to protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all refugees and migrants regardless of their status, but also to take a range of steps to counter xenophobia, racial discrimination, and intolerance.

At the High-Level Meeting, our inspirational Secretary-General launched his campaign to combat xenophobia, which I hope will help to overcome the current negativity.

The Alliance of Civilisations has a critical role to play in countering racism, xenophobia and others forms of intolerance, that seek to dehumanize vulnerable people in need.

The Alliance's work in support of the Secretary-General campaign – particular through its four priority areas of youth, education, media, and migration, will be essential to the campaign's success.

This time last year, world leaders came together to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – a universal masterplan to transform our world, in order to save both people and planet.

If implemented urgently, effectively, and at scale, the 2030 Agenda will overcome the challenges facing our world, by eliminating extreme poverty, building prosperity, sustaining peace, and combating climate change.

This is why we have made the principle objective of the 71st Session of the General Assembly, to drive a universal push for meaningful progress in implementing all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This includes ensuring that the development gains of the 2030 Agenda reach all people including our most vulnerable, so that no one is left behind. Every school in the world should be teaching the SDGs.

Excellencies,

By working together in a spirit of cooperation and compassion, and by holding on firmly to our common humanity, we will overcome and deliver on our commitments to the world.

I wish continued success in your endeavors and stand ready to assist your work to promote intercultural understanding throughout the 71st session.

Thank you.