General Assembly Elects Peter Thomson of Fiji President of Seventy-First Session, Also Selects 21 Vice-Presidents, Main Committee Bureaux

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Seventieth Session,

103rd Meeting (AM & PM)

By secret ballot, the General Assembly today elected by a margin of four votes Peter Thomson of Fiji as President of its seventy-first session, also selecting, in consecutive meetings, Bureaux members of its six Main Committees.

Mr. Thomson defeated Andreas Mavroyiannis of Cyprus, by a vote of 94 to 90, with 1 abstention.  The selection of the Assembly President traditionally follows the system of geographical rotation, with respective regional groups, in this case Asia-Pacific States, putting forward a consensus candidate each year.  If a group cannot reach consensus on a single nominee, the door is open for a rare secret-ballot vote.  The last time it occurred was in 2012, when the Eastern European States nominated two candidates.

Following his election, Mr. Thomson thanked Mr. Mavroyiannis for a fair contest.  He went on to observe that his election represented the first time that a representative of a Pacific small island developing State would take over the Assembly presidency.  Those States brought a special perspective on climate change in particular and he would be vocal on that issue during his term.

However, the universal “high purpose” of the seventy-first session would be momentum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving progress on all 17 Goals, he said.  That would require transforming systems and overcoming intellectual barriers, and without its implementation, the future would be in jeopardy.  He pledged to serve the Assembly and the United Nations in the spirit of fidelity and commitment to the common good, in accord with the purposes and principles of the Charter.

Extending his congratulations, Mogens Lykketoft (Denmark), President of the seventieth session, noted that Mr. Thomson brought extensive experience working in matters of rural development and had also engaged with international affairs for many years.  He expressed his support for Mr. Thomson’s preparations to assume the presidency on 13 September.  Until that date, much work remained to be done during the seventieth session’s final three months, including preparing for the high-level event on large movement of refugees and migrants in September, the Assembly’s revitalization, and further informal dialogues with candidates for the position of Secretary-General, as necessary.  He was determined to leave behind a strong Assembly that all States and people could look up to and depend upon, making it more transparent, inclusive and effective.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon commended Mr. Lykketoft for his many important initiatives, including the adoption of the recent action-oriented Political Declaration on ending AIDS, his convening of thematic debates on pressing global challenges and his travel to crisis frontlines.

Mr. Ban went on to congratulate Mr. Thomson, noting his broad perspective and years of international experience both in Government and the private sector.  As Permanent Representative, Mr. Thomson had served as Chairman of the Group of 77 and China and gained extensive knowledge of the United Nations development system as Chair of the executive boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).  He had also served as Vice-President of the Assembly from 2010 to 2011.  Moreover, Mr. Thomson brought the valuable perspective of small island developing States and was a staunch advocate of sustainable development and addressing climate change.

Also congratulating the President-elect on behalf of regional groups were the representatives of Japan (Asia Pacific States), Bulgaria (Eastern European States), Zambia (African States), Barbados (Latin American and Caribbean States) and Norway (Western European and other States), as well as a representative of the United States, on behalf of the host country.

The Secretary-General, in accordance with tradition, then drew lots to determine which delegation would occupy the first seat in the General Assembly Hall during the next session.  Bolivia was picked and would be followed in English alphabetical order by all other countries, with the same order observed in the Main Committees.

The General Assembly also elected by secret ballot 21 Vice-Presidents of its plenary:  Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Mauritania, Nigeria and Zambia from the African States; Bangladesh, Nepal, Solomon Islands and Turkmenistan from the Asia-Pacific States; Armenia from the Eastern European States; Bahamas, Belize and El Salvador from the Latin American and Caribbean States; and Belgium and Germany from the Western European and other States.  The five permanent members of the Security Council (China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and the United States) serve as Vice-Presidents, as well.

Also today, the five of the Assembly’s six Main Committees, in consecutive meetings, elected their chairpersons and members of their respective Bureaux by acclamation.

The First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) elected Sabri Boukadoum (Algeria) as Chair; Kamapradipta Isnomo (Indonesia), Rene Zeleny (Czech Republic) and María Soledad Urruela Arenales (Guatemala) as Vice-Chairs; and Darren Hansen (Australia) as Rapporteur.

The Second Committee (Economic and Financial) elected Dian Triansyah Djani (Indonesia) as Chair; Arthur Andambi (Kenya), Galina Nipomica (Republic of Moldova) and Ignacio Diaz de la Guardia Bueno (Spain) as Vice-Chairs; and Glauco Seoane (Peru) as Rapporteur.

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) elected María Emma Mejía Vélez (Colombia) as Chair; Masni Eriza (Indonesia), Karina Węgrzynowska (Poland) and Andreas Glossner (Germany) as Vice-Chairs; and Cécile Mbala Eyenga (Cameroon) as Rapporteur.

The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) elected Vladimir Drobnjak (Croatia) as Chair; Wouter Poels (Belgium), Juan Antonio Benard (Guatemala) and Hossein Maleki (Iran) as Vice-Chairs; and Awale Ali Kullane (Somalia) as Rapporteur.

The Sixth Committee (Legal) elected, by secret ballot, Danny Danon (Israel) as Chair.

Before that action, three representatives rejected Israel’s nomination by the Western European and other States and requested a vote by secret ballot.  The representative of Yemen asked that the Assembly take note of his delegation’s 9 June letter to the Committee, sent in his capacity as Chair of the Arab Group, whereby he indicated his Government had rejected the candidacy of Israel for the position of Chair and requested a vote by secret ballot.  The representative of Syria also took the floor, saying that Israel was an occupying force, which contradicted the United Nations Charter, and had continued to occupy Arab territories while it flouted many General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.  The representative of Kuwait, speaking on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, rejected the candidacy of Israel, which he said was an inappropriate choice to act as Chair of a committee that was specifically related to international law, of which it was in flagrant contempt.

The Assembly then elected by acclamation Bilal Ahmad (Pakistan), Zoltán Turbék (Hungary) and Kaswamu Katota (Zambia) as Vice-Chairs; and Isaías Arturo Medina Mejías (Venezuela) as Rapporteur.

Mr. Danon said that given the current situation in the world, the work of the Sixth Committee was more important than ever before.  He regretted, however, that the election procedure had been “hijacked” earlier in the day.  He said he was proud to be the first Israeli to serve at the Chair of the Sixth Committee.

Delegates made general statements about the secret ballot.  The representative of Yemen, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said Israel violated the United Nations Charter, international laws and United Nations resolutions.  Israel had considered itself to be “above the law”.  He regretted to say that there had been no alternative candidate and reaffirmed the Group’s rejection of Israel’s nomination.  The representative of Iran said the secret ballot would go down in history.  Israel had violated international law, humanitarian law and many United Nations resolutions and had denied those actions, rejecting calls made by the international community.  The decision to elect Mr. Danon undermined the credibility of the United Nations.

The representative of the United States congratulated Mr. Danon on his election.  Israel was rarely treated like any other country at the United Nations, he said, noting that votes had been called when that State had been nominated in the past.  Even a representative from Muammar Qadhafi’s Libya had served as a Chair.  He expressed certainty that Mr. Danon would serve well as Committee Chair.  The representative of Norway, speaking on behalf of the Western European and other States Group, expressed regret that the Arab Group had requested a vote, she said, noting that never before had any Committee Chair been elected by a vote.  Today’s proceedings would set an unfortunate precedent, she said.  The representative of Turkey said he did not align himself with the statement just made by his counterpart from Norway.

At the outset of the meeting, Mr. Lykketoft expressed his deepest sympathies to the host country and people of the United States after the mass shooting in Orlando, Florida, on 12 June.  “The loss of so many lives through such an act of barbarism is extremely upsetting,” he said, conveying condolences to the families and friends of the victims.  “This attack demonstrates once again the need for each and every member of this Assembly to continue to work to defeat hate, counter discrimination and prevent violent extremism.”

The representative of the United States, who thanked those in the Assembly that had offered condolences to the people of Orlando and condemned terrorism, said that words were not enough.  Recalling the frequent “pitched fight” in the Assembly over including sexual orientation in its consideration of related draft resolutions, he said action was needed on that matter as part of the work of the next General Assembly session and the next President.

In other business, under the Assembly agenda item on the scale of assessment of the expenses of the United Nations, it took note of information contained in documents A/70/722/Add.7 and A/70/722/Add.8, in which the Secretary-General informed the General Assembly President that Libya and Yemen had made payments to reduce their arrears.