

SDG Summit Highlights: 24-25 September 2019

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit, which is also the first session of the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) to convene under the auspices of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, convened at UN Headquarters in New York on 24 and 25 September. The Summit reviewed progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs, with just over a decade left to the target date of 2030.

The Summit featured six “leaders dialogues” on: megatrends impacting the achievement of the SDGs; accelerating the achievement of the SDGs: critical entry points; measures to leverage progress across the SDGs; localizing the SDGs; partnerships for sustainable development; and the 2020-2030 vision.

The Summit also featured the launch of the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (2019 GSDR). A political declaration was adopted during the opening segment of the Summit.

Opening Session

Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, President of the 74th session of UNGA, opened the 2019 session of HLPF under the auspices of UNGA. He warned that the Sustainable Development Report 2019 concludes that progress on the SDGs is uneven, while calling for new partnerships to unlock the trillions of dollars needed to finance the SDGs.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres issued a global call for a decade of action to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. “We must regain the trust of the people and respond to the experience of alienation generated by the current model of globalization,” he said, calling for action at three levels: global, local, and individual. He announced an “annual platform” to drive a decade of action, the first of which will take place in September 2020 in the context of the UN’s 75th anniversary.

Mona Juul, President, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), stressed the need to aim higher to meet the SDGs, while promoting sustained and inclusive economic growth, bridging the investment gap, and combating exclusion and poverty.

The HLPF then adopted the provisional agenda (A/HLPF/2019/1), elected the Vice Presidents of the UNGA 74th session as Vice Chairs of the Forum, and adopted the HLPF political declaration (A/HLPF/2019/L.1).

A “fireside chat” on the 2019 GSDR, “The Future is Now,” was moderated by Joannie Marlene Bewa, UN Young Leader for the SDGs.

Presenting the report, Peter Messerli, Co-Chair of the independent group of scientists who produced the 2019 GSDR, warned that the Earth system is approaching tipping points which may be “irreversible or even unmanageable.” He listed the six “entry points” identified in the report for accelerated action: human well-being and capabilities; sustainable and just economies; food systems and nutrition patterns; energy decarbonization and universal access; urban and peri-urban development; and the global environmental commons.

Eun Mee Kim, member of the independent group of scientists, cautioned that the world is “going backwards” on inequality, climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological footprint.

Noting the risk of trade-offs between the SDGs, David Smith, member of the independent group of scientists, urged policy makers to consider the Goals holistically. He highlighted four levers for transformation from the report: governance; economy and finance; individual and collective action; and science and technology.

Endah Murniningtyas, Co-Chair of the independent group of scientists, recommended that countries: localize the six entry points in the report; nurture “sustainability science”; and create experimental spaces for collaboration.

Closing the fireside chat, Messerli called on countries to act on the report’s recommendations, and to establish national SDG knowledge platforms to enable policy makers to interact with different sectors.

Plenary

A plenary session followed, with statements delivered on behalf of groups of Member States and participating states.

President Mahmoud Abbas, State of Palestine, speaking for the Group of 77 and China (G-77/China), stressed the need to: respect the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) and respective capabilities; strengthen means of implementation; respect territorial integrity; and reject coercive economic measures. On climate change, he supported ambitious actions in line with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement.

President Peter Mutharika, Malawi, for the group of least developed countries (LDCs), said growth rates in LDCs are projected to decline to 4.6% in 2019. Calling on development partners to deliver their commitments, he noted that overseas development assistance (ODA) fell by 2% in 2019.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, Thailand, for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said the keywords of “acceleration, localization, and cooperation” describe the region’s sustainable development efforts, and underlined ASEAN’s readiness to share best practices with the UN.

Allen Chastanet, Minister for Finance, Economic Growth, Job Creation, External Affairs and the Public Service, Saint Lucia, for the Caribbean Community, called for nuanced rather than one-size-fits-all sustainable development solutions for small island developing states (SIDS), investment to reduce disaster risk and build resilience, and a disaster fund for SIDS, noting that ODA to SIDS continues to decline.

Prime Minister Ruhukana Rugunda, Uganda, for the African States, stressed that the 2030 Agenda recognizes the principle of CBDR. Noting some progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda in Africa, he also highlighted challenges, including development financing and securing just transitions.

Frans Timmermans, Vice President, European Commission, reported on plans to deliver a European Green New Deal and launch an international platform on sustainable finance.

Antonio Rivas Palacios, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paraguay, for the group of landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), called for special attention to the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs for the Decade 2014-2024, and to the Programme’s mid-term review in December 2019.

Wilfred Elrington, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Belize, on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, called for reversal of the trend of declining ODA to SIDS, and for support for risk management.

Juana Alexandra Hill Tinoco, Minister of Foreign Affairs, El Salvador, on behalf of the like-minded group of countries supporters of middle-income countries (MICs), called for: a comprehensive system to coordinate support to MICs; increased and facilitated access to development and climate finance; and multidimensional criteria to determine recipients of development cooperation that go beyond per capita income.

Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State, Holy See, highlighted the special responsibility of those in public office to eradicate poverty in all its dimensions.

Vice President Michael Ashwin Adhin, Suriname, said Suriname’s 2017-2021 development plan is aligned with the three dimensions of sustainable development, and takes an intergenerational approach by including youth at all levels of decision making.

Wang Yi, State Councilor, China, reported that his country is on track to eradicate absolute poverty by 2020, meeting SDG target 1.1 ten years ahead of schedule, and current progress in this area accounts for over 70% of worldwide poverty reduction.

Lord Tariq Mahmood Ahmad, Minister for the UN and the Commonwealth, UK, announced a pledge of GBP 515 million to help over 12 million children in developing countries, half of them girls, to attend school.

President Idriss Déby Itno, Chad, called for a boost in international solidarity, including through transparent North-South and South-South cooperation, and underlined that “leaving no one behind” should not be used as an empty phrase.

Leaders Dialogue 1: Megatrends Impacting the Achievement of the SDGs

Moderator Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President of Ghana, opened the session by noting that choices made in managing megatrends such as demographic changes, economic growth, climate change, and economic and financial shocks will be key to achieving sustainable development.

Moderator Erna Solberg, Prime Minister of Norway and Co-Chair of the UN Secretary-General’s SDG Advocates group, underlined that: climate change can drastically undermine progress; improved youth participation leads to better decision-making; and there is scope for improving tax systems, particularly in low-income countries, to bridge the financial gap.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey, called for support for national efforts to support refugees from, and to address terrorist operations in, Syria, and stressed the need for public-private partnerships.

President Iván Duque Márquez, Colombia, outlined national efforts to overcome inequality, eliminate extreme poverty, improve education coverage, promote gender equality, and increase economic growth.

President Kersti Kaljulaid, Estonia, urged a new understanding of global tax systems to ensure that benefits and social services for citizens working across borders are distributed fairly.

President Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria, highlighted challenging megatrends of population growth, technology advancement, and new trends in financing for development. He urged the international community to fulfil obligations regarding finance, technology transfer, and capacity building.

President Rumen Radev, Bulgaria, called for: a more effective global security mechanism that favors dialogue and multilateralism; a global consensus against corruption; support for “open science”; and reducing the technology gap between countries.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine, said sustainable development is inconceivable without peace and security, citing “Russian aggression” in his country as an obstacle to its economic growth. He reported that Ukraine has a national strategic framework for the SDGs.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan, highlighted that in the role of the Group of 20 (G-20) Presidency, Japan advanced: the Osaka Blue Ocean Vision for zero additional marine plastic litter by 2050; vaccinations for 1.3 million children; and universal health coverage.

Prime Minister Marjan Šarec, Slovenia, said the Slovenia Development Strategy 2030 links each of its development goals to the 2030 Agenda, and the right to potable water is enshrined in the national constitution.

David Malpass, President, World Bank Group, noted the global economic slowdown in 2019 and said challenges that create a “weak growth environment” and impede sustainable development include the exit of the UK from the EU, negative interest rates, trade frictions, and rising poverty.

Jessica Ortega, Co-Chair, Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, speaking on behalf of the Major Groups and other Stakeholders, called for system change and a rejection of false solutions, and expressed solidarity with the struggle of indigenous peoples in Brazil.

Leaders Dialogue 2: Accelerating the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals: Critical Entry Points

Moderator Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Prime Minister of Iceland, noted key areas of concern raised by the 2019 GSDR, including insufficient progress in fighting inequalities, addressing climate change, tackling waste, and decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation.

Moderator Carlos Andrés Alvarado Quesada, President of Costa Rica, said his country has identified three entry points to guide the implementation of the SDGs: fighting poverty and inequality; achieving sustainable cities and communities; and promoting sustainable consumption and production.

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Egypt, called for increased political commitment and financing to achieve the SDGs.

President Milo Đukanović, Montenegro, highlighted efforts to strengthen the National Sustainable Development Council in his country, and the introduction of a central and horizontal system of public administration for SDG implementation.

President Julius Maada Bio, Sierra Leone, drew attention to domestic investments in free quality education, and reforms to increase domestic revenues, strengthen the country’s civil registration system, and address corruption.

President Uhuru Kenyatta, Kenya, highlighted action to guarantee free secondary education for day scholars and facilitate girls’ access to education. He called for treating technology transfer and diffusion as a public good.

President Taneti Maamau, Kiribati, highlighted national efforts to strengthen data collection, and called for capacity building to improve reporting.

King Willem-Alexander, the Netherlands, said the public and private sectors in his country have created a common roadmap to achieve a circular economy by 2050. He stressed the importance of access to justice and women’s rights, noting threats to sexual health and reproductive rights.

President Martin Vizcarra Cornejo, Peru, described a national climate change roadmap with 62 mitigation and 91 adaptation measures, with crosscutting measures for gender, culture, and future generations.

President Andrzej Duda, Poland, announced specific accelerators launched in Poland for SDGs 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 12 (responsible production and consumption) and 13 (climate action), including through plans to increase energy efficiency and reduce smog.

Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, stressed the special circumstances of SIDS, saying ODA to SIDS should not be seen as a gift but rather an obligation, the fulfilment of which is in the interest of developed states. He welcomed the Caribbean Debt for Adaptation Swap initiative.

Qu Dongyu, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, called on politicians, the private sector, and farmers to work together to address challenges to food production and nutrition, and urged assistance to vulnerable states.

Paula Gioia, La Via Campesina, stressed that food production must be based on agroecology and food sovereignty, and by embracing the role of small-scale producers.

In concluding remarks, moderators Jakobsdóttir and Alvarado Quesada noted the importance of rallying support from all stakeholders on the SDGs.

Leaders Dialogue 3: Measures to Leverage Progress Across the Sustainable Development Goals

Moderator Sauli Niinistö, President of the Republic of Finland, stressed the need for a “systematic change in thinking” in finance ministries to take climate change into account, and said his country aims to be climate neutral by 2035.

Moderator Gaston Browne, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, attributed the rise in global poverty and inequality to climate change and protectionist policies.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Kazakhstan, urged better financing for MICs, and proposed a UN inter-regional center in Kazakhstan to focus on accelerating the SDGs.

President Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón, Spain, highlighted: national plans to combat poverty and ensure equality of opportunity; the introduction of a new Spanish Urban Agenda; and a steering plan for dignified labor.

Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, North Macedonia, noted his country’s efforts to provide social assistance for households, boost employment, and invest in innovation and companies.

Prime Minister Kokhir Rasulzoda, Tajikistan, discussed national efforts to: improve coordination for SDG implementation; ensure better indicators and data; and promote national and local implementation through the establishment of 13 working groups.

Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar, Ireland, emphasized his country’s commitment to contributing 0.7% of its gross national income as ODA, and focusing on vulnerable countries, including LDCs and SIDS.

Prime Minister Andrew Holness, Jamaica, said his country’s classification as a MIC is hindering access to finance for implementing the SDGs, and threatening hard-won development gains.

Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Africa, on behalf of the five UN regional commissions, highlighted the need to stem illicit financial flows from developing countries and the transformational potential of SDG 5 (gender equality).

Ann Cairns, Executive Chairman, Mastercard, for the Major Group for Business and Industry, underscored the contributions of the private sector to achieving the SDGs through technology and expertise.

In concluding remarks, moderator Niinistö stressed the importance of awareness raising to change mindsets and stimulate action by governments.

Leaders Dialogue 4: Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals

Moderators Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, President of Croatia, and Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, invited views on challenges and progress in policy coherence and cooperation across different levels of government, from national to local, while implementing the SDGs.

King Mswati III, eSwatini, said implementing the SDGs in his country led to progress in poverty reduction, life expectancy, the protection of people with disabilities, and education. He noted, however, the limited resources available.

President Thomas Remengesau Jr., Palau, said his country's voluntary national review showed that: local ownership is necessary to achieve localization; structural challenges, such as data limitations, can undermine these efforts; and a renewed commitment to international partnerships is necessary.

Prime Minister Lotay Tshering, Bhutan, said his country's 72% forest cover makes the country carbon negative. He described efforts to provide free quality health care and education, and make teaching the country's most highly paid profession.

President Lionel Aingimea, Nauru, highlighted efforts to establish an intergenerational trust fund and strengthen the public financial services sector, while identifying data collection as a key challenge.

Prime Minister Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Neioti Aiono Sailele Malielegaoi, Samoa, said that aligning the SDGs with his country's national development strategy has linked their implementation to existing monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Achim Steiner, Administrator, UN Development Programme, for the UN system, described the UN as "Localization r Us" with activities across levels of government and sectors. He noted the role of local governments as first responders to which people can turn for predictable, accessible support, and the efforts of mayors to use the SDGs to mobilize businesses.

Gabriela Cuevas Barron, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, called for young people to be included in decision-making processes in their own countries, not only in UN conferences. Reporting that only one in four parliamentarians around the world is a woman, she stressed the key role of parliamentarians in SDG implementation.

Tri Rismaharini, Mayor of Surabaya, Indonesia, described local efforts to: build libraries and shared workspaces for young people; provide free ambulance and hearse services; provide internet connections for community leaders; shift to alternative energy sources; and prioritize disaster risk management.

Leaders Dialogue 5: Partnerships for Sustainable Development

Moderator Sahle-Work Zewde, President, Ethiopia, said while stakeholders and governments have a mutual responsibility to implement the SDGs, stakeholders should align with the principles and priorities of their governments.

Moderator Danny Faure, President of Seychelles, said his country is becoming a climate-smart economy by "conceptualizing the ocean as a development space," and highlighted the key role of governance in SDG implementation.

President Salome Zourabichvili, Georgia, reported on a national commitment to double the education budget to up to 6% of GDP by 2022. Citing the USD 37 trillion gap for financing the 2030 Agenda, she noted that Georgia is president of the Leading Group on Innovative Financing for Development.

President Igor Dodon, Moldova, described a national strategic vision based on the causes of vulnerability in his country, including goals for a sustainable and inclusive economy, robust human and social capital, and the right to a healthy and safe environment.

President Klaus Iohannis, Romania, highlighted the creation of national sustainable development units within ministries, and shared national indicators to monitor progress on SDGs.

President Miloš Zeman, Czech Republic, announced national plans to plant 10 million trees before 2025 in urban and rural areas, and enhance stakeholder involvement through an online voluntary commitment platform.

Prime Minister Stefan Löfven, Sweden, stressed the need for public-private partnerships, and for a focus on gender equality while implementing all SDGs.

Prime Minister José Ulisses de Pina Correia e Silva, Cabo Verde, called for meaningful and transformative partnerships to translate ambitions into action.

Prime Minister Christian Ntsay, Madagascar, highlighted his country's ambitions to promote human security and combat poverty, food insecurity, and precarious living. He stressed the importance of international cooperation in achieving these goals.

John Denton, Secretary General, International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), stressed "business unusual" instead of "business as usual" to implement the SDGs.

Akinwumi Adesina, President, African Development Bank, described the Bank's investments towards SDG achievement, including in electrification, agricultural technology, transport, nutrition, finance for women, and access to water and sanitation.

Sharan Burrow, General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation, said the global economic model has failed working people and families, with "inequality by design" fueling an age of anger and despair. She called for a new UN treaty for business and human rights, and for the SDGs and the Paris Agreement to fulfil their promise of a zero carbon, zero poverty world.

Leaders Dialogue 6: The 2020-2030 Vision

Vice President Muhammad Jusuf Kalla, Indonesia, said 21 of the 169 SDG targets have a 2020 deadline, including targets related to biodiversity and natural resource management, noting these will determine progress on the 2030 Agenda.

Carmelo Abela, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Promotion, Malta, described the EU's path to a low-carbon circular economy, and said that gaps must be addressed as soon as possible to leave no one behind.

President Egils Levits, Latvia, urged examination of the 21 SDG targets for 2020 to determine why they are not being achieved, and drew attention to the development of Latvia's national development

plan for the period until 2028, which includes measures to promote a circular economy, steer education and science towards future economic needs, improve social inclusion, and increase trust in government.

Prime Minister Mahathir Bin Mohamad, Malaysia, expressed doubt on whether complete eradication of poverty is possible, and stressed challenges caused by other countries sending waste to Malaysia.

Prime Minister Xavier Espot Zamora, Andorra, highlighted Andorra's national strategic plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, a law on energy transition and climate change, and the 27th Ibero-American Summit to be hosted by Andorra in 2020.

President Azali Assoumani, Comoros, stressed the importance of robust partnerships that engage all stakeholders, and the need for additional finance on concessional terms.

President János Áder, Hungary, highlighted the central role of responsible water management in SDG achievement, and outlined Hungary's efforts to address the "three dramas" of too much, too little, and polluted water.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Armenia, emphasized the importance of a fair judiciary for sustainability and economic growth. He highlighted strong economic growth and a stable financial system in Armenia following its 2018 revolution.

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN Women, warned that the 2020 targets will not be met, national and global financial systems must address wealth concentration, and governments must end fossil fuel subsidies.

Jose Viera, Chief Executive Officer, World Blind Union, said meaningful participation of marginalized groups is essential to fully realize the SDGs, and that evidence-based policy-making should rely on disaggregated data by, among others, sex, age, and disability.

In concluding remarks, Abela said GSDR scientists have given the international community hope that it is still possible to achieve human well-being and eradicate poverty, but action must be accelerated and ambition stepped up as countries enter the decade of delivery.

Plenary

Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Fiji, for the Pacific SIDS, outlined the hardships faced by his region as a result of climate change, called for the replenishment of the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and noted that the Pacific SIDS support the proposal to establish a multi-country office dedicated to the acceleration of the SDGs in the Northern Pacific.

Prime Minister Charlot Salwai Tabimamas, Vanuatu, for the Pacific Islands Forum, noted that Forum members have successfully mobilized USD 1.5 million for the GCF despite facing important environmental, health, gender, and economic challenges, and called on Member States to meet or exceed their Nationally Determined Contributions, under the UN climate change process.

Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, Minister of State attached to the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, France, on behalf of the Group of 7 (G7), called for an "in-depth transformation" of the dominant

development model. He highlighted the Amazon Alliance Against Deforestation, and said France has adopted a roadmap on national SDG implementation.

Prime Minister Saad-Eddine El Othmani, Morocco, reported on the 2018 adoption of a national initiative to assist vulnerable groups and provide education. He said Morocco has also adopted a renewable resource and energy programme.

Vice President Isatou Touray, the Gambia, said her country's 2018-2021 National Development Plan mainstreams the SDGs, and that the government engages the private sector, NGOs, civil society and the media to enhance awareness.

Miroslav Lajčák, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Slovakia, said partnerships can make development sustainable when no partners are left out, including youth. He called for a break from traditional approaches to financing and noted that Slovakia dedicated its 2019 OECD presidency to harnessing digital transformation for sustainable development.

Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cuba, called attention to the "unjust, unequal, and exclusive" international order and lamented restrictions imposed on Cuba that have been intensified in recent months. He said that despite this, Cuba has reduced hunger, malnutrition, and infant mortality.

Ruslan Edelgeriev, Special Envoy of the President, Russian Federation, stressed the importance of financial and substantive contributions from the private sector, philanthropy, and civil society for achieving the SDGs, and called for cooperation rather than restrictive measures and trade barriers. He drew attention to efforts undertaken by local governments, and public-private partnerships.

José Valencia, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, Ecuador, highlighted the need to engage all stakeholders to achieve the SDGs in an inclusive and participatory way.

Rasmus Prehn, Minister for Development Cooperation, Denmark, said his country is ready to take the lead on SDG 7 and highlighted that Denmark has doubled its GCF contribution.

Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Djibouti, said the pillars and programmes of the country's development strategy are aligned with the 2030 Agenda and Africa's Agenda 2063. He called for the UN to organize meetings to enable developed countries and LDCs to coordinate on support.

Alexander Chiteme, Minister of National Planning, Zambia, noted his country hosts the SDGs Center for Africa (SDGC/A) Lusaka Sub-Regional Center for the Southern Africa Region, and underlined the importance of global partnerships and enhancing financing capabilities.

Khemaies Jhinaoui, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tunisia, pointed to several SDG implementation efforts in his country in the area of gender, including the adoption of legislation further enabling women to engage in politics, as well as efforts to empower rural and unemployed women.

Javier Gutiérrez Ramírez, Vice Minister of Environment, Nicaragua, said a new model of consumption and production is required to achieve the SDGs, and noted that his country has achieved a higher degree of social security thanks to over 40 social programmes, including in the area of housing.

Closing Segment

In the closing session, spoken word poet Ameer Brown performed his composition “Instruments”: “It’s only up to us as People in the Planet/ to bring Prosperity and Peace with our Partnership,” it concluded.

Trisha Shetty, Young Leader for the SDGs, said leaders “are failing” to deliver the bold commitments they made in 2015, and the world needs a “dramatic change of course” in 2020. She announced that the Young Leaders will mobilize people for a year of “super activism” to hold governments accountable.

UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed reflected on the power of an active citizenry, combined with the leadership of governments. She said the Summit had sent three messages:

- a renewal of the commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda;
- wide recognition that we are off track to achieve the SDGs by 2030, and greater urgency is needed; and
- acceleration actions announced during the SDG Summit, as well as the initiatives announced during the Climate Action Summit and the High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage, can catalyze a more impactful phase.

Closing the Summit, UNGA President Muhammad-Bande said the political declaration is a commitment by all Member States to achieve the 2030 Agenda, and underlined the need for local action to deliver the SDGs.

The Summit ended at 6:30 pm.

Summary of the HLPF Political Declaration

The HLPF under the auspices of UNGA adopted a political declaration, entitled “Gearing up for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development: political declaration of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit,” on its first day.

The declaration reaffirms the principles in the 2030 Agenda, and launches an ambitious and accelerated response, pledging to make the coming decade one of action and delivery. It commends the work of the HLPF meeting under the auspices of ECOSOC since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, and takes note of the UN Secretary-General’s SDG Progress Report and the GSDR.

Reviewing progress, the political declaration expresses concern in the following areas:

- progress is slowing in many areas, including poverty eradication, hunger, gender equality, and wealth inequality;
- biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, plastic litter in the oceans, climate change, and disaster risk continue at rates that bring potentially disastrous consequences for humanity;
- violent extremism, terrorism, organized crime, corruption, illicit financial flows, global health threats, humanitarian crises, and forced displacement of people threaten to reverse decades of development progress; and
- conflicts and instability have endured, or intensified, and natural disasters have become more frequent and intense in many parts of the world, causing untold human suffering.

The declaration welcomes the voluntary pledges by leaders at the SDG Summit and throughout the high-level week. It requests the UN Secretary-General to engage governments, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders in generating solutions and accelerating action to address systemic gaps in implementation, and to organize an annual moment to highlight inspiring action on the SDGs, in the context of the UNGA general debate. It further commits heads of state and government and high representatives to:

- leave no one behind;
- mobilize adequate and well-directed financing;
- enhance national implementation;
- strengthen institutions for more integrated solutions;
- bolster local action to accelerate implementation;
- reduce disaster risk and build resilience;
- solve challenges through international cooperation and enhance the global partnership;
- harness science, technology, and innovation with a focus on digital transformations for sustainable development;
- invest in data for the SDGs; and
- strengthen the HLPF by carrying out an ambitious and effective review of its format and organizational aspects for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda during the 74th UNGA session.

In the Corridors

This was to be the Summit that launched a decade of accelerated delivery and action. The UN Secretary-General’s progress report released in July during the 2019 HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC started to ring the warning bells: progress on the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs was inadequate. The 2019 GSDR, released at this session under the UNGA, went a step further: a GSDR scientist said the world is “going backwards” in some areas, including on inequality, climate change, and biodiversity.

Despite the presence of global leaders, however, the energy in the Trusteeship Council Chamber during the Summit appeared to be flagging. Attendance in the stakeholder gallery was low, and some observers struggled to differentiate between the General Debates held during the HLPF under ECOSOC, and the Leaders Dialogues under UNGA. Both featured statements rather than debates or dialogues, one observer remarked, and interventions were not entirely focused on the topic of the session.

The message from the GSDR scientists could not be stronger: we seem to find it easier to imagine the end of humanity, observed the GSDR Co-Chair, than changing our systems. Youth leaders were scathing in their final assessment: “Leaders of the world, you made a bold commitment in 2015. But you are failing. We need a dramatic change of course in 2020. This is make or break for the planet.” A stirring rendering of spoken word by Ameer Brown reflected similar frustrations: “Those we look up to as masters of the masses/ have enslaved our every opinion/ Allowing us to drift from the problem and not fix it/ It’s a hard pill to swallow when we’re poverty stricken...”

Will the leaders go home suitably chastened, and shift gears to move into the fast track of action? This remains to be seen.