

HLPF 2018 Highlights: Tuesday, 17 July 2018

The High-level Segment/ Ministerial Meeting of HLPF 2018 on Tuesday included three sessions on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), where 21 countries presented their reports: Albania, Latvia, Niger, Sudan, Armenia, Ireland, Namibia, Jamaica, State of Palestine, Togo, Bhutan, Uruguay, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Australia, Andorra, Canada, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Lao PDR, and Senegal. In the afternoon, the general debate continued in parallel.

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This session was chaired by ECOSOC Vice-President Mahmadamin Mahmadaminov.

Presenting the VNR for **Albania**, Senida Mesi, Deputy Prime Minister, described efforts to: reform public administration and justice systems, with accession to the EU as a key driver; protect human and property rights; encourage economic growth and investment, particularly in resilient infrastructure; and improve water and land management. She highlighted two national success stories: an urban renaissance programme; and a justice reform programme.

Presenting the VNR for **Latvia**, Arvils Ašeradens, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Economics, highlighted: a stable and growing economy; increasing employment; progress in meeting climate change targets; and technological solutions to address linguistic barriers. Among challenges, he highlighted inequalities with a territorial dimension, requiring out-of-the-box solutions. Inese Vaivare, Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation, highlighted efforts to improve human security; social capital; and citizen-generated data and monitoring.

Presenting the VNR for **Niger**, Aïchatou Boulama Kané, Minister of Planning, highlighted national challenges, including: large areas of desert; a young population, with 25% below 25; security threats from surrounding countries; and falling commodity prices, including oil. She reported progress on SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 17 (partnerships); medium progress on SDG 15 (life on land); and low progress on SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), a key priority for the country.

Presenting the VNR for **Sudan**, Gamal Mahmoud Alrayah, Minister of Urban Planning, highlighted three “SDG accelerators:” strengthening justice and good governance; agricultural transformation; and social transformation. Nasreldin Ibrahim Shulgami, a civil society representative, said NGOs in the country

are engaged in implementation, awareness raising, capacity building, advocacy, and data collection for the SDGs. Limyaa Abdulgaffar Khalfallah, Secretary-General, National Population Council, highlighted domestic resource mobilization efforts and a commitment to reduce poverty by 8% annually. Ahmed Magzoub Ahmed Ali, National Assembly, highlighted the commitment of Parliament to implement the SDGs through a framework of legislation and forward-looking strategies.

Lead discussant László Borbély, Head of the Department for Sustainable Development, Secretariat General of the Government, Romania, highlighted the importance of parliamentary engagement in SDG implementation.

Responding to questions from NORWAY, SWEDEN, JAMAICA, ESTONIA, MALI, SERBIA, WOMEN, and NGOs, Mesi said the inter-ministerial national committee for SDG implementation includes civil society and other stakeholders. Ašeradens noted plans to address the negative impacts of recent tax reforms on the income of civil society organizations. Kané emphasized that 16 of the 17 SDGs relate directly to Niger’s national development plan. Alrayah noted that vulnerable populations are integrated in the national development plan, and local governments are actively engaged in SDG implementation.

Presenting the VNR for **Armenia**, Ararat Mirzoyan, First Deputy Prime Minister, described “revolution” as an SDG accelerator that has removed the single largest barrier in the country – the lack of political will. He highlighted safe drinking water, health, clean energy, disaster risk reduction, equal rights for women, income inequalities, and regional partnerships as key priorities.

Responding to questions from GREECE, LEBANON, WOMEN, and WOMEN IN EUROPE FOR A COMMON FUTURE, AZERBAIJAN and BELARUS, Mirzoyan and his delegation highlighted: plans to increase women’s representation in Parliament to 30%; a commitment to address energy, corruption, and environmental issues; youth participation in the governance of the country; the role of the international community in overcoming problems faced by landlocked countries; and the Armenian National SDG Innovation Laboratory, which aims to identify innovative approaches for targeted solutions.

Presenting the VNR for **Ireland**, Denis Naughten, Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Lauren Flanagan, youth delegate, and Paul Dockery, youth delegate, highlighted: the establishment of a national stakeholder engagement forum; a “whole of government” approach to SDG implementation; plans to increase the housing stock by 50,000 homes by 2021; a €22

billion climate-focused investment plan; and a new international development policy that will prioritize “leaving no one behind,” focused on women and girls.

Responding to questions from the UK, LITHUANIA, and CHILDREN AND YOUTH, Flanagan highlighted a report on SDG implementation prepared through extensive consultations with youth. Naughten noted emissions reductions and improved health as the benefits of reducing fossil fuel subsidies.

Presenting the VNR for **Namibia**, Obeth Kandjoze, Minister of Economic Planning and Director-General of the National Planning Commission, highlighted: decreasing inequality; a policy for gender equality in the public sector; increased investment in rural infrastructure; stabilization of an HIV/AIDS pandemic; increased life expectancy from 58 to 65 years; access to electricity for 54% of households; and a high potential for renewable energy that needs to be harnessed.

Responding to questions from LESOTHO and PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, Kandjoze described the integration of SDGs in the national development plan and social grants for persons with disabilities.

Presenting the VNR for **Jamaica**, Parnel Charles Jr., Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, said the national development plan “Vision 2030 Jamaica,” adopted in 2009, is fully aligned with the 2030 Agenda. He noted progress on over 60% of the development indicators from a 2007 baseline, while highlighting the challenges of accessing aid and concessional finance as an upper middle-income (MIC) country, and strengthening data collection and disaggregation.

Responding to questions from ITALY, GREECE, NORWAY, LIBERIA, WOMEN, SINGAPORE, DENMARK, AUSTRIA, and SENDAI STAKEHOLDERS, the delegation from Jamaica described efforts to: improve data systems; mobilize resources; address hazard risk reduction and resilience; promote local community development plans; and empower, educate, and engage stakeholders.

Presenting the VNR for the **State of Palestine**, Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the UN, said six members of the Office of the Prime Minister due to present the VNR were absent because their visas were denied by the US. He highlighted: the creation of a national working group on the SDGs; progress in areas such as education and health; and the impacts of Israeli occupation on efforts to tackle unemployment, provide water and electricity to all, and protect the environment.

In answer to questions and comments from ISRAEL, SOUTH AFRICA, US, EDUCATION AND ACADEMIA, and EGYPT, Mansour pointed to: reports by the Bretton Woods Institutions suggesting that the country would be an MIC if it was independent; efforts to keep the VNR factual and not political; and the inclusion of civil society in political processes, including national dialogues on the rights of women. He thanked the international community for nominating the State of Palestine to lead the G-77/China group in 2019.

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This session was chaired by ECOSOC Vice-President Marc Pecsteen.

Presenting the third VNR for **Togo**, Komi Sélom Klassou, Prime Minister, highlighted: a paradigm shift in the country’s national development plan, designed to make the country a regional logistics and business hub; engaging women, youth, and small farmers;

enhanced land tenure laws; and plans to complete electrification by 2030, using a public-private partnership to provide clean and affordable energy.

Presenting the VNR for **Bhutan**, Lyonpo Namgay Dorji, Minister of Finance, and Thinley Namgyel, Secretary, Gross National Happiness Commission, discussed the integration of SDGs into a transitional development plan as the country graduates from least developed country status in 2023. They highlighted: regional disparities in levels of poverty, inequality, and unemployment; reliance on hydropower and vulnerability to climate change; the country’s commitment to retaining 60% forest cover; and its status as a carbon-negative country.

Lead discussant Miguel Ángel Moir Sandoval, Secretary of Planning and Programming for the Presidency, Guatemala, inquired about Togo’s long-term plans for renewable energy, and Bhutan’s climate change resiliency. Responding to these and other questions from YOUTH VOLUNTEERS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, INDIA, SINGAPORE, THAILAND and NEPAL, Klassou described Togo’s support for risk-sharing among farmers facing climate change impacts and measures to engage the diaspora in development. Namgyel described the central commitment to environmental conservation in the Gross National Happiness approach, and challenges in producing disaggregated data.

Presenting the VNR for **Uruguay**, Álvaro García Rodríguez, Director of the Office of Planning and Budgeting, highlighted: the importance of a human rights approach, pointing to the right to housing and inclusiveness of civil society; being inclusive of the business sector perspective; and their commitment to localizing the SDGs.

In answer to questions from BRAZIL, the INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION, ARGENTINA, and GERMANY, respectively, Rodríguez said regional cooperation provides an excellent opportunity for progress; spoke of efforts to institutionalize the participation of civil society; and elaborated on how a national environment plan will be interlinked with other policies.

Presenting the VNR for **Sri Lanka**, Sandith Samarasinghe, Minister Delegate of the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Wildlife and Regional Development, spoke of the significant progress the country has made since the end of its civil war, which left public infrastructure such as roads in dilapidated conditions. He highlighted: the strengthening of democratic institutions; the reconstruction of public infrastructure; and progress in the areas of education and health, including confirmation of the country’s malaria-free status by the World Health Organization in 2016.

Responding to questions from AUSTRALIA and NEPAL, members of the delegation elaborated on Sri Lanka’s “Vision 2025” policy, which is aligned with the SDGs; and said progress is being made in collecting and disaggregating data, notably through the establishment of digital platforms.

Presenting the VNR for **Switzerland**, Doris Leuthard, Minister of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications, highlighted: the commissioning of an SDG-related baseline assessment; the inclusion of SDGs in existing statistical indicators; a commitment to circular and green economies; and progress needed in areas such as sustainable consumption. Sophie Neuhaus, National

Youth Council, referring to a shadow report by civil society, asked that the next VNR focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups, and on the impact of Switzerland abroad.

Responding to GERMANY, THE CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS and the EUROPEAN DISABILITY FORUM, Leuthard underlined Switzerland's willingness to collaborate with neighboring countries to promote sustainable consumption; highlighted recent changes in financial and tax laws; and agreed that more efforts should be made in the area of inclusivity of people with disabilities.

Presenting the VNR for **Australia**, Gillian Bird, Permanent Representative of Australia to the UN, Duane Fraser, Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, and Darrell Wade, Co-Founder, Intrepid Travel Group, noted: the significance of the SDGs for indigenous communities and Torres Strait Islanders, and their contribution in areas such as conservation; and the contribution of SDGs in generating shared value in the private sector.

Responding to questions from CANADA, INDONESIA, MEXICO, SWITZERLAND and NON-VIOLENCE INTERNATIONAL, Australia highlighted its commitment to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development, gender responsive data, and a regional focus.

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Presenting the VNR for **Andorra**, Maria Ubach Font, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Silvia Calvo Armengol, Minister of the Environment, Agriculture and Sustainability, and Jaume Esteve, President of the Andorran Mountaineering Federation reported that: the SDGs are now the basis of executive and official development assistance decision-making; citizen ownership of Agenda 2030 is encouraged; and the Font Blanca ski race is promoted as an international event dedicated to fighting climate change.

Responding to the STAKEHOLDER GROUP ON AGEING and RWANDA, the presenters affirmed a focus on an inclusive education system, and on reducing the use of plastics.

Presenting the VNR for **Canada**, Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, and Celina Caesar-Chavannes, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, highlighted the compatibility of the Goal to end poverty with the Goal to ensure a sustainable future; the imminent unveiling of the first ever national poverty reduction strategy in Canada; the centrality of SDG 5 (gender equality) to Canada's national and international policy; and a commitment to develop a rights framework for and with indigenous peoples, and address social exclusion of other groups such as the LGBTQ+ community.

Responding to questions from BANGLADESH, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, FRANCE, CHILDREN AND YOUTH, FIJI, and NGOs, Duclos highlighted the importance of: partnerships; ensuring a role for cities and municipalities in tackling climate change; and making diversity a source of strength and pride.

Presenting the VNR for the **Dominican Republic**, Isidoro Santana, Minister of Economy, Planning and Development, pointed to challenges, including: limited funding, due in part to difficulties in collecting taxes; mass movement of people from rural to urban areas; insufficient statistical capacities; and vulnerability to weather risks. He described the creation of a commission and national strategy for sustainable development.

Responding to questions from GUATEMALA, PANAMA, the EU, NGOs, and ACT ALLIANCE, Santana elaborated on implementation strategies in the areas of: water and sanitation; sustainable consumption and production; inclusion of vulnerable groups; and gender issues.

Presenting the VNR for **Egypt**, Hala El Said, Minister for Planning, Monitoring, and Administrative Reform, highlighted: a participatory approach to "Egypt 2030," the national development plan; focus on youth empowerment and human capacity development; major investments in infrastructure, especially road networks and electricity; and the phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies by 2020.

Responding to questions from SINGAPORE, MEXICO, JAMAICA, and CHILDREN AND YOUTH, El Said noted that women make up 38% of the cabinet and highlighted the importance of private sector involvement in SDG implementation. A member of the delegation highlighted the hosting of the 14th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity as an opportunity to discuss mainstreaming biodiversity in the energy sector.

Presenting the VNR for **Lao PDR**, Saleumxay Kommasith, Minister of Foreign Affairs, highlighted that: SDG focal points have been appointed in relevant ministries; more than 60% of the national social and economic development indicators are based on the SDG indicators; poverty rates are declining; sustainable urban transportation projects are part of a green-growth strategy; and efforts are underway to disaggregate data.

Presenting the VNR for **Senegal**, Mame Thierno Dieng, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, highlighted: integration of environment and sustainable development in school curricula; a 47% poverty rate; efforts to ensure that the benefits of development are shared equitably between urban and rural areas; continued efforts to reduce neonatal and maternal mortality despite the high cost of health services; 43.9% health coverage in 2017, with plans to reach 53% by 2021; 99% access to drinking water in rural areas; and 68% and 40% access to electricity in urban and rural areas, respectively.

Responding to questions from GUINEA and WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS, Dieng said the VNRs are an opportunity to learn from the experiences of other countries.

In the Corridors

Bob Marley provided the sound track to the introductory video of Jamaica's VNR, in a day packed with reviews. A "movement of the people" is indeed underway at the HLPF, with civil society writing "parallel" VNRs or even "Voluntary Peoples Reviews." These alternatives have been used by NGOs to respond to presentations, and – as in the case of 14 parallel reports for HLPF 2018 – transmitted to delegations. Specialized reports on cross-cutting and structural topics such as human rights, development effectiveness, and labor rights have been prepared by specialist NGO coalitions. The HLPF Coordination Mechanism for Major Groups would like to see these parallel reports take on a more formal role, possibly along the lines of "shadow reports" used by human rights bodies. They intend to press their case in the run-up to the 2019 HLPF review. As Minister Pearnel Charles Jr. remarked at the end of Jamaica's video, "Makes you want to dance, doesn't it?"

ENB Summary and Analysis: The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of HLPF 2018 will be available on Saturday, 21 July 2018 at <http://enb.iisd.org/hlpf/2018/>

