

HLPF 2019 Highlights: Wednesday, 17 July 2019

At the HLPF on Wednesday, 16 countries presented voluntary national reviews (VNRs) during two sessions, in the morning and afternoon. Central African Republic and eSwatini presented their VNRs in a panel, while individual VNR presentations were made by Iraq, Saint Lucia, Serbia, Tonga, South Africa, Rwanda, Kuwait, New Zealand, Chad, Ghana, Israel, Timor-Leste, Tanzania, and Vanuatu.

Meanwhile, the General Debate continued in parallel throughout the day, with 73 Heads of State, Heads of Government, ministers, and ambassadors, which can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/32vSulX>

Voluntary National Reviews

This morning session on VNRs was chaired by the Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Mona Juul, and the afternoon session was chaired by ECOSOC Vice-President Kira Christianne Danganan Azucena.

Presenting the VNR for **Central African Republic**, Félix Moloua, Minister of Economy, Planning, and Cooperation, reported that after the re-establishment of constitutional order in 2016, following decades of recurring conflicts, his country has developed a Plan of Recovery and Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic. He reported increased school enrollment of children below the age of 5 from 60.7% in 2015 to 62% in 2018; and measures to protect children and women against violence.

Responding to TIMOR-LESTE and WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS, Moloua: urged for support to ensure peace agreements are respected to uphold rule of law and to invest in sustainable development; said his government is working towards ensuring broad stakeholder engagement; and noted that data is outdated due to the long period of conflict.

Presenting the VNR for **eSwatini**, Tambo Gina, Minister for Economic Planning and Development, highlighted: 20% of the population still living in extreme poverty despite progress in efforts to address it; efforts to tackle high youth unemployment rates, including providing funds for micro, small and medium-scale enterprises; and high government expenditure to tackle the impact of an El Niño-induced food crisis.

Responding to INDIA, GHANA, WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS, and the UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR FOR eSWATINI, Gina noted: appreciation for the work of the UN in his country; engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the identification of policy priorities, with plans to engage them “more rigorously”; the need to focus on human capital; and the necessity of sound macroeconomic management.

Presenting the VNR for **Iraq**, Nouri Al-Dulaimi, Minister of Planning, announced success in SDG localization, and efforts to create an enabling environment for SDG implementation despite the humanitarian and economic crises created by war. He said Iraq faces a multitude of challenges, including: high population growth, particularly among the youth; fluctuation in oil prices, putting a strain on the economy; under-performance of public institutions; impacts of climate change; a wide gender gap; the need for urgent post-conflict reconstruction, reliant on public resources; and the lack of data for monitoring the SDGs. Noting that only 63% of the population benefits from health coverage, he highlighted universal health coverage and social services for the poor as priority areas.

Responding to PAKISTAN, INDONESIA, MOROCCO, and PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, Al-Dulaimi noted efforts to address corruption and diversify the national economy, including through supporting innovation and industrialization.

Presenting the VNR for **Saint Lucia**, Gale Rigobert, Minister of Education, Gender Relations, Innovation, and Sustainable Development, reported on the establishment of the National Coordination Mechanism for the 2030 Agenda to provide guidance on implementation and ensure an inclusive process. While reporting progress in health, education, citizen security, agriculture, infrastructure, and tourism, she highlighted, *inter alia*: over 95% of children in the 3-5 age group attend preschool, and education is compulsory from 5 years; social support for women; local disaster committees; and a solar farm that will generate 7 million kilowatt-hours of electricity per year.

Responding to ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, ESTONIA, NORWAY, BARBADOS, and WOMEN, Rigobert highlighted: resource mobilization through

the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, and the Caribbean Community; and efforts to ensure stakeholder participation in the VNR process.

Presenting the VNR for **Serbia**, Slavica Đukić Dejanović, Minister without Portfolio in charge of Demography and Population Policy, and the VNR delegation highlighted: the central focus on children and youth; the role played by the Standing Conference on Towns and Municipalities on needs assessments; and the importance of having clearly identified funds allocated for SDG implementation in the budget.

Responding to NORTH MACEDONIA, NORWAY, SWITZERLAND, WOMEN, EDUCATION AND ACADEMIA, and SLOVAKIA, Dejanović noted: the role of the VNR process in the launch of a countrywide call for cooperation with CSOs; the role of local communities in translating the SDGs into national priorities; and the need to include all stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation.

Presenting the VNR for **Tonga**, Semisi Lafu Kioa Sika, Deputy Prime Minister, said: the SDGs are mainstreamed in policies at all levels; the Ministry of Internal Affairs is working on a cash-transfer scheme for those living in extreme poverty (3.1% of the population); the National Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality strategy has been adopted; and the share of renewables in Tonga's energy mix is 10%, with plans to reach 50% by 2030. He further noted efforts to support entrepreneurship, improve accountability and governance, enhance national monitoring and evaluation systems, improve access to justice, and set up partnerships for climate change adaptation.

Responding to BELIZE, the NETHERLANDS, INDIA, NORWAY, and NGOs, members of the Tonga delegation said: a legal aid programme is funded through blended finance from the government and donors; Tonga has free compulsory primary education and universal health coverage; and the government is collaborating with CSOs on SDG 3 (good health).

Presenting the VNR for **South Africa**, Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane, Minister of Tourism, described the role of the National Development Plan in addressing the legacy of apartheid, reporting: free education for children from poor households; increased representation of women in parliament (from 25% in 1994 to 41% in 2016) and in the judiciary (35% of the judges are women); the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment policy, aimed at increasing employment for marginalized groups; and legislation and policies, including a carbon tax, to address climate change.

Responding to GERMANY, INDIA, ALGERIA, BRAZIL, WOMEN and NGOs, the South African delegation described: the development of a medium-term strategic framework, with indicators that will enable reporting and monitoring; a joint reporting framework for the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement; a programme of action to address gender-based violence; and judicial action to address illicit financial flows (IFFs) and corruption.

Presenting the VNR for **Rwanda**, Claudine Uwera, Minister of State of Finance and Economic Planning, Rwanda, highlighted: 5% growth rate in the agriculture sector, with further efforts to intensify crop farming to support food security; a shift towards integrated and anticipatory disaster risk management; efforts to tackle high rates of stunted growth; a decline in inequality; and a commitment to improve the quality of education.

Responding to GUYANA, BOTSWANA, CHINA, WOMEN, and MAURITIUS, Uwera noted: investment in human capacity and technology to support data collection ability; the need for further investment to increase the scope of monitoring beyond 60% of the SDG indicators; noticeable socio-economic gains through increasing the involvement of women in society; and the engagement of citizens in planning to increase ownership.

Presenting the VNR for **Kuwait**, Khaled Mahdi, Secretary-General, Supreme Council for Planning and Development, described: the transition of the government from an operating to a regulating role, to support private sector driven development; the Kuwait Sustainable Development Award created in 2013 to incentivize a sustainable development focus in national development plans; and a national strategy aimed at ending corruption. Other members of the Kuwaiti delegation from government, civil society, and the private sector announced a national goal to reach 15% of renewables in Kuwait's energy mix by 2030, and an increase in the share of non-oil exports from Kuwait to 60%.

Responding to questions from CANADA, SAUDI ARABIA, BAHRAIN, INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION, and NORWAY, Mahdi mentioned collaboration with academia for evidence-based policy-making.

Presenting the VNR for **New Zealand**, Craig Hawke, Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the UN, said: the well-being approach of the VNR is encapsulated in the Māori proverb 'He waka eke noa' - we are all in this together; key focus areas include reducing child poverty, and work with international partners, including a 30% increase in official development assistance in 2018; and the Living Standards Framework provides a guide for economic, environmental, and social policies, along with a set of indicators to monitor progress, supported by a "well-being budget". A private sector representative reported on the Climate Leaders Coalition, a voluntary action by businesses to reduce emissions.

Responding to CANADA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA, INDONESIA, NGOs, and EDUCATION AND ACADEMIA, the delegation described the indicator framework to monitor the well-being approach; and emphasized a commitment to overcoming challenges such as low SDG visibility, inequalities, and domestic violence.

Presenting the VNR for **Chad**, Issa Doubragne, Minister of Economy and Development Planning, highlighted: progress on developing a legal framework for SDG implementation and

engagement of stakeholders; the need to improve sanitation and address environmental issues; training programmes for parliamentarians to foster coherence between the 2030 Agenda and national plans; and improvements in access to water.

Responding to BURKINA FASO, SINGAPORE, NORWAY, NIGER, MOROCCO, and WOMEN, Doubragne noted: 30% of the government budget is allocated to security challenges, resulting in resource constraints for implementing the SDGs; the need for investments in human resources; efforts to increase the representation of women in parliament; and the need for support from international partners.

Presenting the VNR for **Ghana**, George Gyan-Baffour, Minister for Planning, reported: the integration of SDGs in national budgets; a reduction in poverty from 24.2% in 2013 to 23.4% in 2017; economic growth, making Ghana the fastest growing economy in the world, with a positive trade balance for the first time in 2019; policies to remove cost barriers to education; and a civil society platform for dialogue on the SDGs. A representative of civil society reported progress in the collaboration between the government and CSOs.

Responding to NORWAY, GERMANY, CAMEROON, DENMARK, WOMEN, and NGOs, Gyan-Baffour noted efforts to increase data capacity for SDG implementation and to integrate data from other sources such as civil society and academia; and gender parity at the pre- and primary school levels, with secondary schools approaching parity.

Presenting the VNR for **Israel**, Zeev Elkin, Minister of Environmental Protection and of Jerusalem Affairs and Heritage, reported the use of innovation to tackle sustainable development challenges, including desalination of sea water, to provide over 70% of the nation's water, and wastewater recycling for agriculture. He described free dental services for children and youth; innovations involving artificial intelligence to document medical information; and Operation Good Neighbor, a social programme to support neighboring devastated communities.

Responding to AUSTRIA, ARGENTINA, PALESTINE, AUSTRALIA, CZECH REPUBLIC and NGOs, the Israeli delegation noted that civil society was actively involved in the VNR process; and a decision has been taken to align government strategies with the SDGs.

Presenting the VNR for **Timor-Leste**, Fidelis Manuel Leite Magalhães, Minister of Legislative Reform and Parliamentary Affairs, highlighted: a sequential approach to SDG implementation, with an initial focus on nine Goals that are aligned with the national development plan; achievements, such as a significant reduction in poverty, gender parity in schools, doubling of electricity access, and a petroleum fund for oil revenue; and challenges, including data collection, mobilization of domestic revenue including the need to diversify the oil-based economy, and absorptive capacity.

Responding to THAILAND, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, AUSTRALIA, CANADA, CHINA and NGOs, Magalhães emphasized the interlinkages between public administration, the judicial system, and the private sector.

Presenting the VNR for **Tanzania**, Philip Mpango, Minister of Finance and Planning, described: a focus on industrialization, inclusive economic growth, human development, and public-private partnerships; 90% enrollment in education and public investments in free primary schooling; access to mobile financial services for 78% of the adult population; and challenges related to deforestation, with over 60% of the population reliant on firewood for cooking.

Responding to FINLAND, LESOTHO, DENMARK, CANADA, KENYA, and the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO, Mpango noted plans to use citizen-generated data, support from international financial institutions to strengthen the National Statistical Office, and the need for support from the international community to tackle IFFs.

Presenting the VNR for **Vanuatu**, Ralph Regenvanu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation, and External Trade, reported on: The People's Plan, a national initiative to implement the 2030 Agenda; a free education policy for ages 1-6; and the National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction. He noted that his country was the first to have its VNR peer reviewed.

Responding to TUVALU, CANADA, NORWAY, PAPUA NEW GUINEA, BELIZE, FIJI, and NGOs, the VNR delegation said: the peer review process provided a means for external examination of their actions; and the Second Home plan enables vulnerable persons at risk of evacuation due to crises to find a temporary home.

In the Corridors

So much to say, so little time. This appears to be one of the key procedural problems that HLPF reform will have to address. During the discussions on progress in implementing the SDGs during the first week, and the VNRs and General Debate this week, there was a strict time limit for interventions. A timing device turned off the microphone after a stipulated number of minutes. While some speakers were able to laugh off the embarrassment of speaking after the microphone was turned off, others were frustrated as they were cut off just as they reached the crux of their intervention. Moderators were deeply apologetic, but helpless.

The application of the time limit was thoroughly democratic; it didn't matter if the speaker was a Head of State or Government, minister, or ambassador. As some statements were unceremoniously cut short, it was perhaps fortunate that the audience in the Trusteeship Council was rather thin. The key audience is, however, in capitals, where the abrupt end to some statements, followed by long silences on the webcasts (as the speaker continued to occupy the podium), may cause some head-scratching, said an amused delegate.

