

HLPF 2019 Highlights: Thursday, 18 July 2019

Ten countries presented their voluntary national reviews (VNRs) on Thursday: Cameroon, Tunisia, Congo, Nauru, Guyana, Mauritius, Oman, Liechtenstein, Mauritania, and Turkmenistan. In the afternoon, a session on lessons learned from the first cycle of HLPF and messages for the 2019 SDG Summit took place, followed by the closing of the HLPF.

Meanwhile, the General Debate continued in parallel in the afternoon, with 37 Heads of State and Government, ministers, and ambassadors making statements, which can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/32vSulX>

Voluntary National Reviews

The VNRs were presented in two sessions in the morning and afternoon, chaired by the President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Inga Rhonda King.

Presenting the VNR for **Cameroon**, Alamine Ousmane Mey, Minister of the Economy, Planning, and Regional Development, highlighted: 4% average economic growth rate, with efforts to reach 7% to achieve the SDGs; efforts to reduce the cost of education and improve its quality; and the need to identify new sources of government revenue. Among challenges, he listed mobilization of stakeholders and finance, and implementing a social safety net. Identifying next steps, he listed: intensification of national ownership of the SDGs; strengthening the statistical system; and establishing a multi-stakeholder monitoring body to review progress.

Responding to NORWAY, MEXICO, CONGO, MOROCCO, and the UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR OF CAMEROON, Mey highlighted: the importance of supporting access to education; partnerships supported by the UN reform process, reflecting the principles of ownership and alignment with national policies; and the need to transfer competencies and resources to local authorities for SDG implementation.

Presenting the VNR for **Tunisia**, Belgacem Ayed, Ministry of Development, Investment, and International Cooperation, highlighted: alignment of 58% of SDG indicators with national plans; growing representation of women in public office; and efforts to protect minority rights through legislation. Among challenges, he listed: a lower than expected economic growth rate; high rate of youth unemployment, at 29%; and the ongoing need to support migrants.

Responding to NORWAY, MEXICO, OMAN, WOMEN, LIBYA, the UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR OF TUNISIA, EDUCATION AND ACADEMIA, UN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (UN ESCWA), and ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK, Ayed noted: the introduction of economic and structural reforms; compulsory education, with the proportion of female students at 60%; and efforts to diversify the economy to expand growth in non-tourism sectors.

Presenting the VNR for the **Congo**, Ingrid Olga Ghislaine Ebouka-Babackas, Minister of Planning, Statistics, and Regional Integration, reported on: structural reforms to increase the country's resilience to fluctuating oil prices through strengthened governance, building human capital, and economic diversification; 90% integration of the SDGs in the national development plan, with implementation focused on 14 SDGs and 134 targets; 80% integration of children with disabilities in the schooling system in 2017; and policies addressing the needs of indigenous peoples.

Responding to NIGER and CAMEROON, Ebouka-Babackas said the Congo has agreements with the International Monetary Fund for attracting private investment, and with the World Bank, for statistical capacity building.

Presenting the VNR for **Nauru**, David Adeang, Minister for Finance and Sustainable Development, reported on: a focus on building resilience against climate change impacts, particularly in the fisheries sector; establishment of the National Planning and Development Committee; alignment of reporting for the VNR and the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, to avoid duplication; establishment of banking and financial services; and improved enrollment in schools.

Responding to AUSTRALIA, NORWAY, SOLOMON ISLANDS, FIJI, and NGOs, Adeang said sea level rise is a threat to Nauru's development, and the current priority is to move to higher ground.

Presenting the VNR for **Oman**, Ali Masoud Ali Al Sunaidy, Minister of Commerce and Industry, highlighted integration of the SDGs into the Ninth Five-Year Plan and Vision 2040, a development plan to shape future policies. He described strategies for SDG implementation, including: fostering human empowerment; building a knowledge-based and competitive economy; achieving peace; ensuring environmental sustainability; generating finance, including through integration in the national budget; localization, with the engagement of governorates; and monitoring through quality data.

A youth delegate from Oman highlighted the National Youth Programme for Skills Development, and the engagement of youth in the development of Vision 2040.

Responding to TUNISIA, ESTONIA, PAKISTAN, NORWAY, WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS, INDIA, and ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK, Al Sunaidy and the delegation noted: efforts to provide education to persons with disabilities, including health and social services; programmes and plans to combat non-communicable diseases; Oman's withdrawal of its reservations on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and data dashboards for improved data accessibility.

Presenting the VNR for **Mauritius**, Nandcoomar Bodha, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration, and International Trade, and Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport, said the Mauritius Vision 2030 document incorporates the 2030 Agenda, the Agenda 2063 of the African Union, and SAMOA Pathway. He described measures to reduce poverty and inequality that have contributed to reducing the Gini coefficient from 0.414 in 2012 to 0.4 in 2017, including negative income tax, minimum wages, social housing schemes, free tertiary education, and participation of women in public service. He noted that 2.15% of the GDP is invested in adaptation and mitigation to climate change.

Responding to CANADA, URUGUAY, INDIA, RWANDA, and PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, he said the lack of a military allows public spending to be focused on social welfare and described efforts to promote sustainable development through environmental impact assessments and public awareness campaigns in schools.

Presenting the VNR for **Guyana**, Dawn Hastings-Williams, Minister of State, said the national sustainable development agenda is anchored in the Green State Development Strategy. Her delegation highlighted an emphasis on: expanding access to health facilities to the hinterlands; environmental education; resilient agriculture; reforms in the education sector; and promotion of community participation.

Responding to NORWAY, BELIZE, JAMAICA, CANADA, UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, CHINA, AGING, and CABO VERDE, the delegation said 17% of the government's budget is directed to education; and national commissions address the needs of the elderly and people with disabilities.

Presenting the VNR for **Liechtenstein**, Christian Wenaweser, Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein to the UN, noted: progress on all the SDGs, except SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), and SDG 15 (life on land), where he said his country faces major challenges. As success stories, he highlighted that 40% of agriculture is organic, and Liechtenstein has the highest amount of solar energy generated per capita. A civil society representative on the delegation proposed the establishment of a national sustainable strategy and institutional structures for SDG implementation. A youth delegate proposed the inclusion of youth as volunteers to support aid programmes around the world.

In response to questions by MEXICO, ARGENTINA, INDONESIA, ZAMBIA, and EDUCATION AND ACADEMIA, Wenaweser and his delegation highlighted: rule of law as an overarching priority; the role of the International Criminal Court in

strengthening national judiciaries; and education as a pre-condition for gender equality, decent jobs, and employment.

Presenting the VNR for **Mauritania**, El Moctar Djay, Minister of Economy and Finance, said the National Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity 2016-2030 is aligned with the 2030 Agenda, and focused on economic diversification, inclusivity, and eliminating inequality, including through cash transfers for the poorest. He said 42% of the energy mix is from clean sources, investments in the social sectors are being doubled, and a health insurance scheme for vulnerable groups is being instituted. A member of the Mauritanian delegation reported achievement of gender parity in schools.

Responding to CANADA, UN ESCWA, the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, SENEGAL, and NGOs, Djay highlighted the need for institutional coordination for SDG planning and monitoring.

Presenting the VNR for **Turkmenistan**, Batyr Bazarov, Minister of Finance and Economy, reported: 84% of SDG targets are reflected in national policies; access to affordable, high-quality medical services; enlisting of 17 youth ambassadors for SDGs; free primary and middle schools; reduction of rural and urban inequalities; afforestation programmes to combat climate change; and action plans to combat human trafficking and corruption.

Responding to UZBEKISTAN, BELARUS, PAKISTAN, TAJIKISTAN, NORWAY, KAZAKHSTAN, ROMANIA, and CHINA, Bazarov noted the establishment of a working group to coordinate SDG implementation, and plans to raise USD3 million by 2025 for implementation.

Lessons Learned from the First Cycle of the HLPF and Messages for the 2019 SDG Summit

This session was chaired by ECOSOC President King. It started with an "intergenerational dialogue" between David Donoghue, co-facilitator of the intergovernmental negotiations on the 2030 Agenda, and Jayathma Wickramanayake, UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. Wickramanayake called for the empowerment of youth, and fulfillment of the SDGs to ensure young people, constituting half the world's population, have security, jobs, and opportunities to fulfil their potential. Donoghue said the intention to put "the infinite capacity of young people for activism" at the heart of the 2030 Agenda had not yet been realized, and worried that young people feel "betrayed" by their political institutions. Wickramanayake responded that while young people are not waiting for leaders to act, political polarization is eroding the space available to them for expression.

Moderator Helen Mountford, World Resource Institute, said the rest of the session will include two parts: lessons learned, and key messages for the SDG Summit, preceded by an intergenerational dialogue.

Lessons learned from the first cycle of HLPF: UN Under-Secretary-General Liu Zhenmin said the achievements of the HLPF so far include presentation of 142 VNRs; review of all of the SDGs; organization of regional fora; and stakeholder contributions. He listed areas for improvement: high-level political guidance for accelerated action; the need for systematic reporting on all SDGs; evidence-based analysis in VNRs; better identification of areas where assistance is required in VNRs; and better exchange of experiences.

Presenting the preliminary and partial results of a survey conducted to inform the upcoming HLPF review process, Zhenmin said respondents believed the HLPF has fulfilled its functions; and the VNRs were useful to share lessons and challenges, advance implementation, and mobilize partners.

Muhammad Abdul Mannan, Minister of Planning, Bangladesh, highlighted the role of the VNR process in triggering the review of institutional coordination for SDG implementation.

Oumar Bassirou Diop, Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Cooperation, Senegal, said the VNR process helped engage different sectors and constituencies in SDG implementation.

Jan Vapaavuori, Mayor of Helsinki, Finland, said cities bring “undeniable” value to SDG implementation.

Marianne Beisheim, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, said the HLPF process is a success in terms of attendance and attention, but called for more political guidance in the Ministerial Declaration to ensure follow-up and action-based outcomes.

Saumya Aggarwal, Youth for Peace International, called for changes to: the economic growth model that poses serious threats to the climate and the environment; the weak linkages between regional and global fora; and the general and thematically siloed discussions at the HLPF.

In the discussion that followed, the EU appreciated the in-depth reviews of the SDGs, but called for a strengthened focus on interlinkages. MALI called for strengthening the role of regional forums. UN CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT highlighted the role of trade in SDG implementation. MEXICO called for national and local fora to be given a voice in the HLPF process. NGOs referred to the HLPF as the “crown jewel of the UN’s development pillar” but said it needs to be remodeled to include more voices, more space for interaction, a stronger secretariat, and better use of regional institutions. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES called for making the process accessible for people with disabilities, including through providing sign language translation and materials in Braille.

Providing responses, Mannan and Diop supported strengthening regional UN institutions and fora. Vapaavuori said Helsinki, Finland, was the second city after New York to prepare a “voluntary local review” and proposed better integration of cities in the second cycle of the HLPF. Beisheim suggested improving the workflow to enable more action-oriented outcomes. Aggarwal called for the HLPF to provide meaningful spaces for accountability and civil society participation, and regional and inter-regional exchanges.

In concluding remarks, Donoghue proposed improvements in addressing: crosscutting issues; SDG interlinkages; regional implementation; and engagement with civil society and youth. Wickramanayake called for ensuring a feedback loop after HLPF that involves civil society; and solutions to transnational and global issues such as migration.

Messages to the SDG Summit: Summarizing key messages for the SDG Summit, Rapporteur Gloria Amparo Alonso Masmela, Minister of National Planning, Colombia, said the strong country ownership of SDGs was evidenced by the 142 VNRs presented, with 15 countries presenting twice; the national actions on the SDGs; local-level reflection; and budgetary allocations for the SDGs. Among challenges she listed difficulties in long-term planning, awareness building, and resource mobilization. On ways to accelerate actions, she emphasized education, reducing inequalities,

providing decent work, scaling up climate action, and ensuring peaceful and just societies.

Rapporteur Wenaweser noted that few countries have concrete plans for financing SDGs and emphasized the need to mobilize domestic resources, including creating enabling environments for investments. To accelerate progress, he proposed: understanding interlinkages, synergies, and tradeoffs; the role of science, technology, and innovation in enabling co-benefits; governance, for integration and coordination; accurate and timely data for informed decision-making; gender equality and empowerment of women and girls; partnerships, including international cooperation; and regional forums that enable a space for peer learning and showcasing practical solutions.

Closing of the HLPF

ECOSOC President King introduced the draft procedural report (E/HLPF/2019/L.1), which was adopted without amendments.

Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed highlighted three main areas: “the inclusion imperative,” noting that those who have been left behind are still behind; democratic and effective institutions, which form the bedrock of SDG implementation; and political commitment. She said national ownership of the 2030 Agenda at a time when multilateralism is being threatened indicates political commitment, while identifying three areas for improvement: data analysis; meaningful engagement of civil society; and solution-oriented VNRs that capture interconnections.

In her closing statement, ECOSOC President King noted the need to move out of our comfort zones and advance with a swifter pace of implementation. She called for further mainstreaming SDGs into planning, integrating the SDGs into budgets, and bringing multiple actors together for implementation. She invited everyone to commit to take transformative action as the decade of action on SDG achievement is launched.

The meeting was gavelled to a close at 6:04 pm.

In the Corridors

With the first cycle of the HLPF winding down, the task at hand for the delegates was clear: double down for a decade of action for SDG implementation. As 142 countries presented their VNRs in this cycle, to many the political commitment of countries was obvious. There is an uptake of the SDGs in national plans, countries are allocating the funds, partnerships are being forged, and progress is being achieved in some areas. But, is this fast enough? If countries want to harness the “infinite capacity of the youth for activism”, to move better, faster, and strong, the writing on the wall is clear: create the space for youth to be more engaged and support their promising and scalable solutions.

But how will the HLPF support this? A hopeful delegate noted, “the areas where the HLPF can be improved have indeed surfaced”, hoping that Member States would act when the opportunity arises later in the year. More meaningful engagement of all stakeholders, nationally, regionally, and at the HLPF, came out consistently. As a veteran delegate noted, “the 2030 Agenda is already comprehensive, the only thing we can do is to make sure we widen the base of support,” adding “that is where urgency can meet scale.”

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of the 2019 HLPF will be available on Monday, 22 July 2019, at <http://enb.iisd.org/hlpf/2019/>

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