

HLPF 2018 Highlights: Monday, 16 July 2018

The High-level Segment/ Ministerial Meeting of HLPF 2018 opened on Monday at UN Headquarters in New York. The opening session was followed by two sessions on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), where 14 countries presented their reports: Ecuador, Kiribati, Lithuania, Mali, Guinea, Greece, Mexico, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Benin, Cabo Verde, Slovakia, Bahrain, Colombia, and Viet Nam. A parallel session in the afternoon included: reporting on regional forums; an address by the President of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA); an introduction to the UN Secretary-General's reports on ECOSOC's main theme and thematic discussion; and an introduction to the report of the UN Committee for Development Policy (CDP). A general debate started on Monday afternoon.

Opening of High-level Segment / Ministerial Meeting

ECOSOC President Marie Chatardová chaired this session. In opening remarks, she noted insufficient progress on the 2030 Agenda and pointed to the importance of science, technology, research, engagement with the private sector, and policy coherence.

Miroslav Lajčák, President of the UN General Assembly, said there are causes for celebration but more causes for concern, citing worsening global inequalities and climate change impacts. He called for non-traditional sources of financing and more inclusive processes.

Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General, said momentum is being lost in tackling areas such as undernourishment and urban poverty. She warned against an "SDG-light" approach, while underlining the need for increased coherence, transparency, and accountability as key elements for reform of the UN development system.

Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, encouraged countries to involve young people in the HLPF process, either as co-writers of VNRs or as youth delegates.

Keynote speaker Michelle Yeoh, UN Development Programme Goodwill Ambassador, underlined the importance of more conscious consumer choices, for instance to reduce the "rampant overconsumption" in the fashion industry by being more "consciously-dressed citizens."

Voluntary National Reviews 1

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Presenting the VNR for **Ecuador**, José Augusto Briones, National Secretary of Planning for Development, said the national development plan in his country is aligned with the 2030 Agenda, and has resulted in a reduction of multi-dimensional poverty. He described Ecuador's recognition of rights throughout the lifecycle of citizens.

Presenting the VNR for **Kiribati**, Teuea Toatu, Minister for Finance and Economic Development, and Martin Tofinga, Representative of Non-State Actors in Kiribati, highlighted: alignment of the national development plan with the 2030 Agenda; achievements in education and literacy; high levels of child mortality; the negative impacts of climate change; and challenges around institutional capacity, including lack of finance for data processing.

Presenting the VNR for **Lithuania**, Kęstutis Navickas, Minister for Environment, highlighted: support for education; re-organization of the residential care system; a low carbon and circular economy; and renewable energy. He committed to increasing the country's contribution to official development assistance (ODA).

Presenting the VNR for **Mali**, Mahamane Maiga, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Drissa Doumbia, Head of Department at the Agency for the Environment and Sustainable Development, and Modibo Traore, Director of Multilateral Cooperation, highlighted: appreciation of societal transformation and resilience in the wake of the Algiers Process on peace and reconciliation following the worst crisis the country has known; concerns about land degradation; and increased dependency on ODA.

Lead discussant, Kimmo Tiilikainen, Minister for Environment, Energy and Housing, and Vice-Chair of the National Sustainable Development Commission, Finland, highlighted: coordination of 2030 Agenda implementation by the Prime Minister's office; localization of the 2030 Agenda; and the role of national parliaments.

In response to questions from NGOs and BURKINA FASO, Briones highlighted the engagement of the president of the National Assembly of Ecuador in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and his government's commitment to rural areas and the involvement of young people. Toatu and Tofinga said the VNR process is part of the mid-term review of Kiribati's national plan and highlighted the engagement of non-state actors in its preparation. Navickas noted an

ambitious national goal to fully integrate SDGs into policies. Traore confirmed links between migration and land degradation in the region, and the engagement of the Mali National Assembly and local authorities in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

From the floor, MOROCCO asked how stakeholder engagement can be institutionalized. Briones responded that a clear link between participation, planning, and budgeting is essential. Traore said Mali has a gender-balanced committee to involve stakeholders.

Introducing a video on the impacts of fashion on sustainability, Yeoh highlighted the importance of challenges such as microfibre contamination of oceans and dangerous and poor conditions for workers, and promoted the use of forest fibres and a predominant role for consumers in pushing for sustainability through better choices.

Presenting the VNR for **Guinea**, Kanny Diallo, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, highlighted: successes in increasing resilience to economic, social, environmental, and health shocks, including the eradication of the Ebola outbreak; the need to increase statistical capacity for SDG monitoring; and the encouraging results obtained on all six SDGs under review through the promotion of good governance and the inclusive development of human capital.

In response to a question from the FRANCE VOLONTAIRES, Diallo pointed to the cost-effective role of volunteers in data collection and generating new ideas.

Presenting the VNR for **Greece**, Socrates Famellos, Alternate Minister of Environment and Energy, George Vernicos, President, Economic and Social Council of Greece, and Aikaterini Igglezi, Member of Parliament and President of the Special Permanent Committee on Environmental Protection, highlighted: the endorsement of a national plan for a circular economy; new legal frameworks connecting biodiversity with all relevant sectors; and plans to increase the share of renewables in the energy mix to 50% by 2030.

Responding to questions from SAINT VINCENT AND GRENADINES and the EUROPEAN DISABILITY FORUM, Famellos noted that the national plan on a circular economy is part of Greece's economic growth strategy; and the government is trying to make political participation as inclusive as possible.

Presenting the VNR for **Mexico**, Francisco Guzmán Ortiz, Head of the Office of the President, said: 31 of Mexico's 32 states have established follow-up and review mechanisms for SDGs; 12 states have development plans aligned with the 2030 Agenda; and plans are underway for universal water, drainage, and sanitation coverage by 2030, and to increase the share of renewables in the energy mix to 30% by 2030, and 50% by 2050.

Responding to questions from CANADA and EGYPT, Ortiz said special economic zones help promote economic inclusivity; and noted the need to address technology through public policy.

Presenting the VNR for the **UAE**, Abdulla Lootah, Vice-Chair of the National Committee on the SDGs and Director General of the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority, highlighted: the use of data and policies informed by evidence in SDG implementation; UAE's hosting of the World Data Forum in 2018; the appointment of a Minister of Youth Affairs to increase social inclusion; and the reorientation of UAE's foreign aid programmes to align them with the SDGs.

Responding to questions from SLOVAKIA, BAHRAIN, and EGYPT, Lootah noted plans to: make renewable energy the backbone of the economy; reach zero food waste by 2030; and introduce a law to address the gender pay gap.

Voluntary National Reviews 2

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Presenting the VNR for **Benin**, Abdoulaye Bio Tchane, Minister of Planning and Development, highlighted efforts to: provide access to safe drinking water to all by 2021; and develop public policies to address the SDGs, including through social safety nets for vulnerable populations and persons with disabilities.

Presenting the VNR for **Cabo Verde**, José da Silva Gonçalves, Minister of Tourism, Transport and Maritime Economy, highlighted: efforts to integrate the SDGs in national planning, with 74% of the national strategic indicators directly related to the SDGs; extensive involvement of local administrations; and financing challenges unique to small island developing States (SIDS).

Lead discussant Jiko Luveni, Speaker of the Parliament, Fiji, said financing for development remains the greatest challenge in development, especially for LDCs, land-locked developing countries, and SIDS.

In response to questions from the CSOs FOR FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT GROUP, Tchane pointed to efforts to include civil society in SDG implementation, particularly in improving access to water; and said costing SDGs and innovative financial instruments can help finance implementation.

Gonçalves described the importance of finance to SIDS, given their vulnerability to natural catastrophes that can result in debt; and said that while graduating from an LDC to a middle-income country is a financial burden, the goal of development is "to improve and get better." In response to a question from NORWAY, he elaborated on how national policies can support the SDGs.

Presenting the VNR for **Slovakia**, Richard Raši, Deputy Prime Minister for Investments and Information, highlighted the need to: anchor the SDGs in all public policies; build ownership by all stakeholders; engage in partnerships at all levels, from the regional to the municipal; align budgets with 2030 Agenda priorities; and encourage voluntary actions. Daniel Bunda, student from Slovakia, highlighted low levels of income inequality; pressure on Roma populations because their socioeconomic background; long-term unemployment; and the need for inclusion of persons with disabilities and the elderly. Ivana Maleš, Institute for Circular Economy, called for a transition to a knowledge-based and green economy; reduction of greenhouse gases and implementation of adaptation measures; and improving access to affordable and clean energy for the private sector and households. Vladimír Krčmery, St. Elizabeth University of Health Care and Social Work, highlighted health disparities based on gender and socioeconomic background; and good governance, democracy, and peace.

Responding to questions from GREECE, KENYA, INDONESIA, SINGAPORE, and NGOs, Raši said the national priorities he described had been developed through local, national, and regional consultations; and priorities were being translated to the local level, in addition to aligning budgets and developing a national investment plan.

Presenting the VNR for **Bahrain**, Mohammed Bin Ibrahim Al Mutawa, Minister of Cabinet and Head of the National Information Committee, highlighted: a people-centered approach to development; the establishment of a national information committee

that will help institutionalize the SDGs; an online monitoring system for monitoring the implementation of the national development plan, which integrated 87% of the SDGs targets; and a social protection system that covers 80% of families.

Presenting the VNR for **Colombia**, Luis Fernando Mejía Alzate, Minister of National Planning, highlighted: a multi-stakeholder platform for SDG implementation; plans to achieve universal access to drinking water; and the introduction of a carbon tax. He said 20% of the companies in Colombia are reducing their water consumption; 21% are recycling the materials they use; and there is a 30% reduction in the use of plastic bags.

Responding to questions from DENMARK and INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, Mejía Alzate introduced an online platform that allows multi-stakeholder participation, and tax exemptions for remote rural areas to integrate them into the economy.

Presenting the VNR for **Viet Nam**, Nguyen The Phuong, Vice-Minister of Planning and Investment, highlighted that: 99% of households have access to energy, yet Viet Nam is lagging behind with regards to renewables; rural infrastructure has been expanded to cover 99% of the country; efforts are made to integrate people with disabilities in society and economy; and a national database of genetic resources and traditional knowledge has been developed.

Responding to questions from LAOS, SINGAPORE, AUSTRALIA, and NGOs, Phuong noted the leveraging of public finance for catalyzing private investment and the creation of multi-stakeholder forums for SDG implementation.

Reporting on Regional Forums

This session was chaired by ECOSOC Vice-President Jerry Matthews Matjila.

Ghassan Hasbani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Public Health, Lebanon, presented messages from the 2018 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, highlighting: the role of VNRs in setting priorities; the role of NGOs, civil society, private sector, and parliaments; equity in the distribution of resources; digital infrastructure; and a gender specific approach to the 2030 Agenda.

Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz, Minister of Foreign Trade and Investment, Cuba, presented messages from the 2018 Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, highlighting agreement to: embed SDGs in state policies to make them immune to transitions in government; enhance South-South cooperation; and address poverty, external debt, and reliance on international cooperation.

Levan Davitashvili, Minister of Environment and Agriculture, Georgia, presented messages from the 2018 Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, including: regional cooperation to implement the 2030 Agenda; a focus on vulnerable populations; engagement at all levels of government, including local government, and of stakeholders; interlinkages between SDGs; and the positive impact of VNRs on policy development and review of progress. He highlighted gaps in statistical capacity.

Mame Thierno Dieng, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, Senegal, highlighted key messages from the 2018 Africa Regional Forum for Sustainable Development, including: harmony between the 2030 Agenda and the African Union's Agenda 2063; improvements in access to water and electricity in the region; major initiatives such as the Great Green Wall of the Sahara and the Sahel to combat desertification and climate change; and the need for integrated national frameworks.

Michael Gerber, Special Envoy for Global Sustainable Development, Federal Department for Foreign Affairs, Switzerland, said the 2018 Regional Forum for Sustainable Development in Europe highlighted five priorities: practical peer learning; universality of SDGs; regional platforms to connect government and other stakeholders; SDG interlinkages; and transboundary dimensions of SDG progress, like cooperation on water management.

Address by UNEA President

Siim Kiisler, Minister of Environment, Estonia, and UNEA President, reported that pollution has impacted on almost every ecosystem and outlined recommendations on: increasing research and data collection; science-based decision making in the public and private sectors; investment in innovative solutions; sustainable lifestyles; fiscal measures to support environmental solutions; integrated policy and law; the need to bolster monitoring and accountability; sharing best practices in education; the promotion of North-South, South-South, and triangular collaboration across the UN system; and the expansion of stakeholder partnerships.

Introduction of UN Secretary-General's Reports on ECOSOC Main Theme and Thematic Discussion

Elliott Harris, UN DESA, standing in for Liu Zheming, UN Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, presented a report of the UN Secretary-General on harnessing new technologies to achieve the SDGs (E/2018/66). Acknowledging concerns at the “dazzling” speed of technological progress, he highlighted drivers of risk and the need for local ownership, capacity building, policy integration, and inclusivity. Commenting on the *World Economic and Social Survey 2018* due in October, he said a better understanding of the UN's role in shepherding technology to support sustainable development, and of the negative externalities of technologies, is needed. He called on governments to share knowledge and form alliances and partnerships.

Introduction of CDP Report

José Antonio Ocampo, CDP Chair, highlighted LDC-related issues, including: the CDP's recommendations from the 2018 triennial review of the LDC category; the monitoring of the development progress of graduating and graduated countries; and the need for an incentives package of improved assistance to graduating LDCs.

In the Corridors

Forest-fiber fashion and “Mandela shirts” added glamour to the opening of the High-level Segment of HLPF on Monday. Michelle Yeoh, star of the *wuxia* film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* pitched sustainable fashion to HLPF delegates, saying the fashion industry is one the largest sectors in the world, valued at more than US\$2.5 trillion and employing 75 million people. If it was a country, it would be the world's fifth largest economy in terms of GDP. She missed her target this time, said a participant, by laying the responsibility on consumers and not the “manufacturers of desire and unnecessary consumption.” Meanwhile, a sartorial theme with a socio-political slant was championed by ECOSOC Vice-President Matjila, who drew attention to his “summer collection” of batik shirts to mark Nelson Mandela Day on 18 July during the Ministerial Meeting. High-level efforts to patch up the Ministerial Declaration, meanwhile, appeared to make more threads unravel: disagreements now exist not only on the paragraphs mentioning foreign occupation and means of implementation, but also on gender, rights of children, and water.



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