

HLPF 2019 Highlights: Tuesday, 16 July 2019

The High-level Segment of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Ministerial Segment of HLPF opened on Tuesday morning with opening statements. This was followed by the presentation of voluntary national reviews (VNRs) by 14 countries through the day. In the afternoon, the High-level Segment continued, with sessions on messages from the regional forums on implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and from other intergovernmental organizations, to the HLPF. A general debate followed, starting with presentations of the reports of the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) on long-term trends and scenarios and on the theme of HLPF 2019 session (empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality); and of the Committee on Development Policy (CDP).

Opening of the High-level Segment of ECOSOC / Ministerial Segment of HLPF

Inga Rhonda King, ECOSOC President, opened the session, which started with a dance performance on the HLPF 2019 theme.

Statements from five representatives of Children and Youth followed, calling for: support for access to education; employment opportunities; platforms for youth to discuss exploitation and violence; opportunities to follow their dreams and passions; environmental protection; tolerance; and peaceful and just institutions.

In her opening statement, ECOSOC President King said the HLPF has kept the international community focused on the 2030 Agenda, and the Group of Friends of VNRs will carry the Forum's message to the SDG Summit in September.

UNSG António Guterres said four years after the 2030 Agenda was adopted, the picture is discouraging: a handful of men own as much as half of humanity; 30% of young women and 13% of young men are not in school or employment; and no country in the world is on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. He called for: "dramatically scaling up" private and public investments in SDGs, including reversing the trend of declining official development assistance (ODA); shifting to a green economy and increasing climate finance; implementing the Global Compact on Migration; and strengthening the global commitment to end conflict. He invited governments to "kickstart a decade of delivery and action".

María Fernanda Espinosa, President, UN General Assembly (UNGA), said the international community has only 11 years to avoid devastating climate change, but climate action presents a USD26 trillion growth opportunity up to 2030. Noting that empowering women and girls is the closest we have to "a magical formula" for sustainable development, she said the five summit-level meetings at UN Headquarters in September 2019 will be a key opportunity to show that multilateralism works.

Mary Robinson, Chair, The Elders, described the 2030 Agenda as one of the most important diplomatic achievements of this century. Citing the alarming findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, she said the Paris Agreement and 2030 Agenda can no longer be considered voluntary. Describing climate change as "grotesquely unfair", with the poorest, who have contributed the least, paying the highest price, she urged industrialized countries to show more ambition.

Richard Curtis, screenwriter, producer, and film director, said achieving the SDGs requires: partnerships that leverage a variety of skills; urgency, keeping in mind the "simultaneity of human suffering"; and seizing the "unique opportunity" presented by the SDGs before the window of opportunity begins to close, and an acceptance of failure sets in. He called on the UNGA to commit to hosting an annual meeting on the SDGs, to drive progress.

Hoelsing Lee, IPCC Chair, said achieving the SDGs will be made more challenging by the impacts of global warming, but the impacts will be considerably less if global average temperature rise is limited to 1.5°C, instead of 2°C. He called for high material and energy efficiency; low greenhouse gas-intensive food consumption; equity and effectiveness; and international cooperation to address climate change, while creating new opportunities for the economy, society, and the environment.

Voluntary National Reviews

The two sessions on the VNRs in the morning and afternoon were chaired by ECOSOC Vice-Presidents Omar Hilale and Mona Juul.

Presenting the VNR for **Iceland**, Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir said 65 priority targets provide guidance for an inter-ministerial working group in implementing the SDGs. She highlighted gender-related efforts to eradicate violence, improve representation of women in labor markets, and legislate equal pay. Representatives of the Icelandic Youth Council called for

role models to inspire and spark progress in achieving the SDGs. A representative of Iceland's Climate Council highlighted the Climate Action Plan launched in September 2018, which aims to make Iceland carbon neutral before 2040.

Responding to questions from CANADA, UK, CHILDREN AND YOUTH, and ROMANIA, Jakobsdóttir highlighted: the equal pay standard, shared parental leave, and universal childcare to provide gender equality in the labor market; a youth forum to enable inclusion of youth diversity; and a policy to manage health impacts of alcohol consumption.

Presenting the VNR for **Burkina Faso**, Lassane Kabore, Minister of Economy, Finance, and Development, reported an income inequality rate of 35.5% and a 40.1% poverty rate, jeopardizing social cohesion and exacerbating conflict. He highlighted progress on gender parity in education, which is currently 1:1 (men to women) for primary education; 1:1.12 for secondary education; and 1:0.75 for tertiary education.

Responding to questions from CHAD, NIGER, WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS, and EDUCATION AND ACADEMIA, Kabore explained that the peace and security challenges posed by terrorism result in decreased social spending, but the government focuses on investments in education and supporting entrepreneurs as key measures for achieving the SDGs.

Presenting the VNR for **Lesotho**, Tlohelang Aumane, Minister of Development Planning, highlighted progress on poverty eradication and chronic and acute malnutrition, while pointing to widespread micronutrient deficiency and stunting as persistent problems. Among challenges, he highlighted: a high drop-out rate in secondary school; a low economic growth rate; and the impact of climate shocks. A youth representative from Lesotho urged: enacting legislation to ensure that children are protected from violence; increasing the minimum age for marriage to 18; empowering women and girls to become agents of change; and the development of effective and strong institutions.

In response to questions from NORWAY, TANZANIA, ESTONIA, ZIMBABWE, and NGOs, Aumane noted: the enactment of laws to protect the rights of young people; the need for disaggregated data; performance-based finance programmes to reduce school drop-out rates; and collaboration with the private sector to increase investment in job creation.

Presenting the VNR for **Palau**, Sinton Soalablai, Minister of Education, reported on universal access to quality health care; achievement of 98% school attendance; reduction in poverty and malnutrition; reduced gender, ethnic, and rural-urban inequalities; and increased regional and global partnerships. A civil society organization (CSO) representative said her inclusion into the VNR delegation is evidence of Palau's commitment to include CSOs in SDG implementation.

Responding to HONDURAS, SINGAPORE, PERU, NORWAY, and FIJI, Soalablai said his country is diversifying the economy to build climate resilience; the Responsible Tourism Policy Framework promotes high value tourism; and support is provided for pelagic artisanal fishing and climate-resilient agriculture and aquaculture.

Presenting the VNR for **Kazakhstan**, Zhaslan Madiyev, Vice-Minister, National Economy, said: 80% of the SDG targets are integrated in government plans and strategies; human capital is a priority, with 99.8% of citizens over 15 years of age having received education, and 54.3% holding higher education degrees; plans are underway to increase the income of 40% of the poorest by 2025; and Kazakhstan has become a nuclear-free state.

Responding to questions from BOLIVIA, RUSSIAN FEDERATION, BANGLADESH, BELARUS, MOROCCO, BAHRAIN, TUVALU, and PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, he noted plans and projects to transform Kazakhstan's economy into a low-carbon economy, institute the polluter pays principle, conduct environmental assessments, and integrate people with disabilities into society and the economy.

Presenting the VNR for **Algeria**, Rachid Bladehane, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, highlighted: the alignment of the SDGs with national plans; a reduction of extreme poverty; elimination of hunger and child marriage; Algeria's contribution to re-structuring the debt of LDCs; and challenges such as urban environmental impacts.

Responding to NORWAY, SOUTH AFRICA, ETHIOPIA, and CHILDREN AND YOUTH, Bladehane emphasized: the engagement of civil society in VNR preparation; the opportunity to examine the social objectives of policies as a part of the VNR process; and the need for a framework to follow up and monitor all indicators.

Presenting the VNR for **Pakistan**, Kanwal Shauzab, Parliamentary Secretary, highlighted: the SDG Unit for implementing the Goals; the National SDGs Framework with guidance on implementation; medium-term development targets to achieve zero hunger; a new Ministry of Poverty Alleviation, with a budget of USD190 billion; and scholarships for girls, in addition to financial and digital services for 6 million women.

Responding to OMAN, TURKEY, and WOMEN, Shauzab and other members of the VNR team described: national youth programmes; laws to provide justice for women and protect them against harassment; and efforts to promote climate smart agriculture.

Presenting the VNR for the **UK**, Rory Stewart, Secretary of State for International Development, noted the UK's commitment to spend 0.7% of gross national income for ODA, and to reach net zero emissions by 2050. He said the VNR process facilitated learning, and identified challenges in the UK related to housing, access to food banks, and child poverty. Representatives of the private sector, youth, and civil society on the VNR delegation highlighted the need for greening investments, enhancing data capacity, and expediting climate action.

Responding to questions from AUSTRALIA, ALGERIA, INDONESIA, ICELAND, CROATIA, WOMEN, and NGOs, Stewart described a new focus on poor and marginalized communities.

Presenting the VNR for **Côte d'Ivoire**, Joseph Seka Seka, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, said 83% of the SDGs have been integrated into national policies, and reported: expansion of universal health cover; compulsory schooling for 6-16 year olds, leading to increase in primary school completion from 63.9% in 2014 to 80.5% in 2018; implementation of a national strategy on reducing emissions from deforestation, forest

degradation, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries (REDD+) to combat climate change; and successful measures to recover from a political crisis after the forceful removal of former president Laurent Gbagbo.

Responding to FRANCE, NIGER, WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS, MOROCCO and NGOS, Seka described a multistakeholder committee composed of state and non-state actors to ensure inclusiveness in the VNR process; and actions to include persons with disabilities in universal health cover and special needs schools.

Presenting the VNR for **Fiji**, Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister of Economy, highlighted: a near 100% literacy rate and free primary and secondary schools; leadership to combat climate change; building of infrastructure networks to expand the reach of development; and fostering of upward mobility through grants for entrepreneurs and sustained economic growth over the last 10 years. A civil society representative on the delegation identified free education, legal literacy and advocacy, and microfinance as examples of initiatives that have helped foster SDG implementation.

Responding to questions from LEBANON, CANADA, SINGAPORE, TUVALU, and GHANA, Sayed-Khaiyum stressed: a commitment to greater grassroots participation; the importance of concessional finance; and the need for structural reforms that support SDG implementation.

Presenting the VNR for **Mongolia**, Khurelbaatar Chimed, Ministry of Finance, said Mongolia has a Sustainable Development Vision 2030, but the government has not identified priority targets. He highlighted institutional arrangements to ensure “whole of government” and “whole of society” approaches, including: a multistakeholder working group to identify national SDG targets and indicators; the National Council for Sustainable Development; the National Development Agency, which provides technical support for policy integration; and the National Statistical Office, which strengthens the evidence base.

Responding to NORWAY, JAPAN, WOMEN, CHILDREN AND YOUTH, and SIERRA LEONE, Chimed highlighted: legislation requiring public consultation; construction of over 200 schools to achieve SDG 4; and awareness-building on the SDGs through newspapers, television, and social media.

Presenting the VNR for **Cambodia**, Yanara Chhieng, Minister Attached to the Prime Minister, and Thavrak Tuon, Secretary of State, Ministry of Planning, highlighted substantial reduction in the incidence of poverty, and the localization of the SDGs through the formulation of Cambodia Sustainable Development Goals (CSDG), which include an additional Goal on clearing landmines. Tuon described CSDG targets, including on performance-based budgeting, public service provision, and monitoring. He highlighted challenges, including: the need for bold and fundamental reforms; the need for new sources of finance, such as blended finance; data gaps; and the availability of technologies.

Responding to questions by the PHILIPPINES, MYANMAR, VIET NAM, NGOs, and LAO PEOPLE’S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC, members of Cambodia’s VNR team noted: an expectation to attain middle-income status by 2030; a consultative mechanism for inclusive participation of all development actors;

and a focus on issues to sustain growth, such as human resources, the private sector, inclusive development, and diversification of the economy.

Presenting the VNR for **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, Josip Brkić, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, described efforts to re-establish post-conflict peace after the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina that ended almost 25 years ago; and ambitions for EU accession. He described a national SDG framework to inform planning processes, and the ‘Imagine2030’ initiative, a blueprint for meaningful dialogue and stakeholder engagement.

Responding to SWEDEN, CZECH REPUBLIC, NORTH MACEDONIA, CHILDREN AND YOUTH and SWITZERLAND, he noted: multistakeholder workshops; development of indicators; and a plan to enable resilience against floods.

Presenting the VNR for **Croatia**, Zdravka Bušić, State Secretary for Political Affairs, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, reported that Croatia is “firmly on track” to achieve four SDGs, with improved performance on nine other Goals. She said: all citizens are guaranteed the right to healthcare; children up to age of 18 spend around 13.5 years in school, with a drop-out rate of 3%; the average salary of women is 12.5% lower than that of men, the ratio of women in parliaments is 21%, and of women’s ratio in judiciary is 71%; more than 90% of the population has access to safe drinking water; and the share of renewables in the energy mix is 20%.

Responding to GUYANA, UK, SIERRA LEONE and WOMEN, members of the Croatian delegation presented policies aimed at enhancing regional integration and protection of its forests, which cover 47.7% of its territory.

What Are Regions Telling Us About Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs?

This session, focused on messages from the Chairs of the regional forums on sustainable development, was chaired by ECOSOC President King. Moderator Alicia Bárcena, UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, pointed out that all five UN Economic Regional Commissions are currently led by women.

Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz, Minister of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment, Cuba, presented key messages from the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, saying 144 priority indicators have been identified for the region, and equality remains a key challenge.

Fidelis Magalhaes, Minister for Legal Reforms and Parliamentary Affairs, Timor-Leste, said the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development highlighted: the need for accountability for achieving the SDGs; the key role of technology, multistakeholder partnerships, and data in advancing sustainable development; and the need for stronger regional cooperation.

Nezha El Ouafi, Secretary of State to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Sustainable Development, said the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development highlighted that: two-thirds of the African countries have not yet reached the goal of universal education; 48 African countries have ratified the Paris Agreement and adopted ambitious measures; and regional trade agreements in Africa enhance regional integration and spur economic growth.

Ogerta Manastirliu, Minister of Health and Social Protection, Albania, presented outcomes of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UN ECE) Regional Forum, including: the need to improve the disaggregation of data; rising levels of inequality and youth unemployment in the region; diverse needs of learners at all stages of life; and opportunities for leveraging new technologies to achieve SDG 13 (climate action).

Nouri Al-Dulaimi, Minister of Planning, Republic of Iraq, said the Arab Forum of Sustainable Development acknowledged the slow pace of SDG implementation in the region, and sought inventive solutions, particularly related to priority areas such as inequalities, increasing poverty levels, weak economic growth, high unemployment rates, climate change, wars, conflicts, occupation and displacement.

Respondent Sarah Zaman, Women's Action Forum, called for a change in the nature of discussions in the HLPF, saying systemic issues raised at the regional level are not currently reflected. She highlighted the important role of regional-level bodies in addressing issues such as illicit financial flows, tax avoidance, and trade, while proposing that interim VNRs are presented at the regional level before they are presented at the HLPF.

In the discussion, UGANDA underscored the need for a statistical fund to support the alignment of data with legislation in Africa. CHAD highlighted the need for support for economic diversification in Central Africa. GUINEA called for supporting fragile states in SDG implementation. Providing concluding remarks, panelists underscored the need for: support from international institutions for SDG implementation; mobilizing youth; preserving multilateralism; and improving data collection and disaggregation.

Messages to the HLPF

Ola Elvestuen, President, Fourth UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 4) and Minister of Climate and Environment, Norway, presented messages from UNEA 4, including: ensuring the health of the planet by tackling biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution; UNEA and HLPF must provide political guidance and inspire ambition for sustainable consumption and production; and rule of law governing the environment is key to promoting equity and inclusiveness.

Michelle Bachelet Jeria, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, reported on the Human Rights Council's Intersessional Meeting for Dialogue and Cooperation on Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. She said Member States, UN representatives, national human rights institutions, civil society, businesses, and academics emphasized that implementing the SDGs requires a human rights-based approach locally, nationally, regionally, and globally.

Boris Greguška, Chair, UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) 14 Bureau, presented key messages from UNFF 14, including: forests have a key role in combating climate change; many of the world's poorest people depend on forests, and securing forest tenure is a prerequisite for reducing poverty and inequality; and the HLPF needs to promote the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests.

Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UNSG's Envoy on Youth, reported on the 2019 ECOSOC Youth Forum, noting that 90% of the world's youth live in developing countries and face enormous challenges, but are not actively engaged in decision-making. She said the Forum emphasised the need, among other things, to involve youth in national and sub-national planning and budgetary processes, provide access to education, training, and capacity building, and address discrimination and xenophobia.

Guy Ryder, Director-General, International Labour Organisation (ILO), presented the outcome of the ILO Centenary International Labour Conference, which adopted an ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, and a Convention and accompanying Recommendation to Combat Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. He highlighted areas addressed in the Declaration, including challenges such as climate change and the need for new skills, while calling on Member States to ratify the Convention.

General Debate

This session was chaired by ECOSOC President King.

Elliott Harris, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, presented key messages from the UNSG's reports on long-term trends and scenarios and on the theme of ECOSOC 2019 session, saying: inequality is multidimensional and increasing; countries need to build strong and inclusive institutions and effective mechanisms for stakeholder participation in SDG implementation; and the international community needs to capitalize on the potential of frontier technologies to accelerate SDG implementation, including by protecting biodiversity hotspots, while mitigating risks to the labor market and widening inequality.

José Antonio Ocampo, Chair, CDP, presented the highlights of the CDP report, including: current levels of inequalities within and between countries are unsustainable, with many not just being left behind, but being pushed behind; climate change and environmental degradation are the gravest risks the world is facing; reaching the SDGs necessitates the implementation of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities; and many least developed countries are at high risk of being left behind.

In the Corridors

At the opening of the HLPF High-level Segment, the sub-text of all the speakers was clear: we are facing a global emergency, but our response is simply not ambitious enough. From the youth representatives to the UNSG and Mary Robinson, speaker after speaker called on governments to seize the opportunity to "turbo charge" the 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement.

Richard Curtis (screenwriter for Notting Hill, Bridget Jones's Diary, and Love Actually... and Mr. Bean) reminded governments that this is an emergency they cannot face alone. "No one denies we're all in a boat on a wild sea. We have to use the skills of everyone. Some to build the boat. Some to guide it. Some to row the boat. Some when the boat sinks, like Yusra Mardini, to grab the ropes and swim the boat to safety".

This session of HLPF, he said, has to provide energy and information for the September SDG Summit, which has to be a "visionary planning session". "We cannot say: we'll be back and report sensibly in 2023. We have to say: we'll be straight back in 2020 with utter determination, new partners, and increased urgency to go for Gold".