

HLPF 2023 Highlights: Monday, 17 July 2023

The Ministerial Segment of the 2023 session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) opened with calls for renewed commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and for countries to bring concrete plans and pledges to the SDG Summit in September 2023. These sentiments were echoed frequently in national statements during the Segment's general debate held over the rest of the day.

The sixth day of HLPF 2023 also featured a “fireside chat” with scientists who helped prepare the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 (GSDR), and, in a parallel session, the presentation and discussion of five second Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and a third VNR from one country.

Opening of the Ministerial Segment

UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) President Lachezara Stoeva (Bulgaria) opened the Ministerial Segment.

Asma Rouabhia, Global Focal Point, SDG 7 Youth Constituency, and Jevanic Henry, Member, UN Secretary-General Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change, jointly noted that youth are at the frontlines of current polycrises and bear the brunt of the lack of progress on SDGs. Remarking that this is the time to collectively reflect, assess the situation and chart a different way forward, they urged unified, solutions-oriented efforts that center meaningful youth participation.

Stoeva reflected on lessons learned from the first five days of this HLPF, highlighting the key roles of tailoring SDG implementation to local contexts and priorities; aligning national priorities with the SDGs; and increasing participation and fostering dialogue across all sectors of society. Noting the HLPF serves to build momentum, identify priorities and mobilize stakeholders and resources for an ambitious SDG Summit this September, she encouraged all to stay focused and determined towards successfully meeting the 2030 Agenda.

Noting world hunger has returned to 2005 levels, bridging gender inequality could take 300 years, and nearly 600 million people will still experience extreme poverty in 2030, UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged leaders to change course, describing the 2030 Agenda as the path “to bridge divides and rebuild trust.” He called for all nations to come to the SDG Summit with clear plans and pledges. Noting finance is the “fuel” to drive progress on SDGs and that global financial and debt-relief

architectures must be urgently reformed, he outlined his SDG Stimulus plan, which calls for unlocking USD 500 billion annually for developing countries.

Csaba Kőrösi, President, UN General Assembly (UNGA), said to see the transformative changes needed to realize the 2030 Agenda, seven changes are needed:

- adopting national strategies aligned with the SDGs;
- aligning regulations with the Goals;
- learning how to calculate the important externalities of actions or inactions on SDGs;
- reducing the negative externalities identified and accentuating the positive ones;
- identifying and prioritizing game-changing elements;
- building a transparent roadmap; and
- devising a science-based evaluation for SDG implementation.

He urged countries to come to the SDG Summit determined to make it unconventional. “Let’s keep up the promise of the 2030 Agenda and the promises we made to our eight billion stakeholders,” he concluded.

Hoesung Lee, Chair, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), said limiting climate change is critical to realize the 2030 Agenda. Noting that climate change is a threat multiplier and mitigation and adaptation have more synergies than trade-offs for the SDGs, he suggested that deep greenhouse gas emission cuts may be the most effective contribution to sustainable development. He added that the path to net zero requires clear commitments and coordinated policies.

Fireside Chat Featuring GSDR Scientists

Moderated by Salvatore Aricò, CEO, International Science Council, this session featured a conversation with two Co-Chairs of the Independent Group of Scientists writing the [GSDR 2023](#), Imme Scholz, Co-President, Heinrich Böll Foundation, and Jaime Miranda, Head of Sydney School of Public Health, University of Sydney, Australia.

Scholz highlighted the GSDR’s stylized model of how transformation happens, stating it shows change processes are not smooth, trade-offs are sometimes necessary across competing Goals and targets, and that as new pathways emerge, others must be phased out. She stressed the responsibility of science to generate “socially robust knowledge” based on transdisciplinary, collaborative and locally-oriented solutions.

Miranda provided a personal reflection of losing close family to COVID-19, expressing hope that science and policy actors would seize on this collective moment of suffering to shape the

transformations we wish to see. Miranda said the GSDR is not intended to be prescriptive but rather to provide an analytical framework to accelerate transformative actions at different levels.

On how to further influence multilateral negotiations, Scholz highlighted efforts to ensure GSDR messages are fed into national preparations for the SDG Summit. Miranda expressed appreciation for the space provided for the science community to support this multilateral process, and to help address “the headaches that come with it.”

In her response to the discussion, discussant Marilyn Holguín Clover, Youth Delegate, The Millennials Movement, described the GSDR as a “holistic” roadmap that can inspire young people to drive change and said her movement is committed to disseminating the report to push for behavior change.

Building Momentum Towards the SDG Summit

ECOSOC President Stoeva opened the general debate. Cuba, on behalf of the G-77/CHINA, lamented the reversal of progress on poverty and hunger, stating the aspiration of a new international world order cannot wait. He called for urgent action to reform the international financial architecture and international trade, and to implement the SDG Stimulus, the Loss and Damage Fund, and other global commitments prioritizing the most vulnerable countries and regions.

Indonesia, representing the MIKTA (MEXICO, INDONESIA, KOREA, TURKEY and AUSTRALIA) cross-regional consultative platform, pledged their commitment to contribute to inclusive global recovery and bridge capacity gaps for the SDGs.

Botswana, for the LAND-LOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (LLDCs), highlighted how growing debt distress is exacerbating pre-existing geographical challenges in LLDCs, calling for, *inter alia*: scaling up financing; investing in sustainable transport, energy and digitalization; and elevating technical support for bankable projects, policy innovation, and improved monitoring.

Costa Rica, representing the JUSTICE ACTION COALITION, lamented plummeting trust in justice systems globally, stressing the need to mobilize sufficient resources for legislative reforms that prioritize the delivery of justice in collaboration with the most affected and vulnerable populations.

Nepal, for the LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES (LDCs), underscored the disproportionate impacts of overlapping global crises on LDCs. Among other actions, he called for: global consensus on allocating the SDG Stimulus; implementation of the Doha Programme of Action for LDCs; and honoring commitments on technology transfer and aid for trade.

Belarus, on behalf of the 26-member GROUP OF FRIENDS OF THE FAMILY, underscored the “undisputable” role of family-centered policies and programmes in advancing the SDGs, highlighting preparations for the 30th anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2024.

The Philippines, for the ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH EAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN), outlined synergies between the 2030 Agenda and the ASEAN Vision 2025 strategy, highlighting issues such as promotion of rural development and poverty alleviation, achieving sustainable energy security, and bridging the digital divide.

Tanzania, for the AFRICAN GROUP, called for: enhanced support to realize Africa’s renewable energy potential; strengthening digital connectivity; climate-proofing key sectors such as water and infrastructure; and fostering regional trade and economic partnerships.

Samoa, for the ALLIANCE OF SMALL ISLAND STATES (AOSIS), highlighted the SAMOA Pathway and encouraged a holistic rather than a siloed consideration of the SDGs. He noted high priority challenges for SIDS include high water scarcity.

Belize, for the CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY, welcomed initiatives addressing “contemporary realities” such as the SAMOA Pathway, the Bridgetown Initiative, and the SDG Stimulus plan.

Malta, for the UN LGBTI Core Group, stressed diversity and inclusion are fundamental pillars for leaving no one behind and drew particular attention to SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and the need for cities to eliminate barriers to inclusion of LGBTI persons and marginalized groups.

Colombia, for the GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN, noted that SDG 16 (peace, justice) is among Goals for which no target is on track and urged leaders to recommit to the Goal.

After the group speakers, 53 speakers for individual countries, including 41 ministers, representing ministries of finance, foreign affairs, development, health, environment, planning and international cooperation, expressed commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. In addition to describing national and local progress on the SDGs, they expressed concern about the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and ongoing conflict on the 2030 Agenda. Several noted there is no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

Among other challenges, SLOVAKIA noted the growing polarization of societies due to misinformation and NORWAY and CZECHIA called for rebuilding a climate of trust.

On the path forward, many speakers, including BRUNEI, BAHRAIN and CANADA, recognized the need for a whole of society approach. TURKMENISTAN, SLOVENIA and ANDORRA stressed the importance of including voices from the private sector, civil society and youth. AUSTRIA, LIBYA, and SOUTH AFRICA noted the role of partnerships, including public-private partnerships. SIERRA LEONE stressed support from both traditional and non-traditional partners. CZECHIA and GEORGIA highlighted the importance of localizing the SDGs.

ROMANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MALDIVES, GEORGIA, and FIJI stressed the need to promote digitalization and investment in digital infrastructure. UGANDA, SOUTH AFRICA, and SIERRA LEONE noted science, technology and innovation are drivers of sustainable economic growth. ZIMBABWE, BOTSWANA, GUINEA, and BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA highlighted the need for disaggregated and accurate data.

GERMANY called for reduction of inequalities; ANDORRA and GUINEA noted the importance of fully integrating women in achieving the SDGs and in all areas of life, with FINLAND adding that gender equality stimulates economic growth and

reduces income inequality. MONGOLIA and FIJI called for reducing disparities between rural and urban populations.

UGANDA, HAITI, SOUTH AFRICA, BRUNEI, GUATEMALA, MALDIVES, LAO PDR, FIJI, LIBERIA, MOROCCO, KIRIBATI, and GERMANY highlighted the need for adequate means of implementation and greater international cooperation.

EGYPT stressed the importance of innovative and concessional finance for developing countries. BARBADOS, HONDURAS, PAPUA NEW GUINEA, ETHIOPIA, and FRANCE called for reform of the international financial architecture, with BARBADOS and the UK adding support for the Bridgetown Initiative. MALAWI, among others, called for better access to finance and sustainable debt levels. GUYANA noted that developed countries still have not met their past commitments on official development assistance or have yet to embrace adopting a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index to guide concessional financing.

BOTSWANA and the UK, among others, noted developing countries need strong public finance through tax collection and tackling illicit financial flows. HONDURAS requested a special UN commission to help tackle corruption.

There was general agreement that the September SDG Summit provides an opportunity to deliver on the SDGs and put the world on a more sustainable path. CROATIA promised to bring concrete commitments to the Summit. BURKINA FASO said the Summit must take stock of the needs of poor countries and not leave anyone behind. EGYPT, TAJIKISTAN, and UZBEKISTAN called for the Summit to commit to address water scarcity. Many agreed that only through a renewed spirit of genuine cooperation can the 2030 Agenda have a fair chance of success. As noted by FRANCE, “we cannot resign ourselves to failure and the SDG Agenda must remain our common lodestar.” PANAMA concluded that only by working together can we overcome the challenges facing us and build a better world.

Voluntary National Reviews

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Guyana, Romania, the Central African Republic, and Uzbekistan presented their second VNR, with Chile presenting its third report.

DRC: Judith Suminwa Tuluka, Minister of Planning, noted governmental initiatives on infrastructural reforms, including a localized development plan (LDP) and improving taxation systems; national economic growth and recovery rates increasing from 6.2% in 2021 to 8.5% in 2022, due in large part to mining; and the multiple challenges arising from persisting conflict situations in the eastern regions, which have forcibly displaced over five million people domestically.

She outlined national programmes to increase access and affordability for clean water and energy services, highlighting work to liberalize these two sectors; national strategies to diversify the economy, including using mining sector tax revenue to industrialize the agricultural sector; regulatory governance for formalized housing and urban transportation in light of high urbanization rates; and a national framework for sustainable development financing.

In response to questions from GERMANY, CONGO, DENMARK, BELGIUM, UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA, STAKEHOLDER GROUP OF COMMUNITIES DISCRIMINATED ON WORK AND DESCENT, and NORWAY, Suminwa Tuluka recalled the slowed progress on the SDGs due to ongoing conflict causing direct impacts as well as diverting financial resources. She reported implementing the LDP is hindered in besieged territories and called for UN sanctions on countries that support the terrorist groups. Noting the DRC’s change in government since its last VNR, she highlighted the new national action plan, and explained that implementing the LDP includes investment in public infrastructure, using ground-up approaches and establishing mechanisms for community ownership. On the differences in progress on SDGs 6 and 7, she said more laws and regulations have been implemented for electricity, and action on water sector legislation is ongoing. She reiterated the diversification plan for the DRC’s economy includes using six special economic zones to bolster development and industrialization for agriculture.

GUYANA: Ashni Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, highlighted the “One Guyana” approach to tackle food, energy and climate security, and SDG-aligned national strategies to decouple economic growth from a carbon-based economy. He noted the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated and rendered visible pre-existing challenges and remarked on the necessary diversion of already scarce resources from SDG progress work to pandemic-related containment and recovery efforts. He highlighted national objectives to improve data collection on the Goals and implementing deliberate policy interventions focused on accelerating development, before reporting on the five SDGs in focus at this HLPF, including improved availability and sustainable management of water infrastructure (SDG 6), with hinterland populations’ access to drinking water increasing from 33.8% in 2019 to 75% in 2022; and accelerated investments for connectivity (SDG 9) and affordable housing programmes (SDG 11).

Responding to questions by the PHILIPPINES, VIET NAM, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP, and SWITZERLAND, Singh noted Guyana’s innovative carbon credit strategy developed in 2009, done in partnership with Norway, which paid USD 250 million over a five-year period, under a performance-based arrangement for the climate service Guyana’s carbon storing forests provide. He said investment in climate-resilient infrastructure that catalyzes economic growth, such as agro-food production and energy services, contribute to a low-carbon economic transition. Singh reiterated Guyana’s population-geography challenges, emphasizing all citizens, regardless of remoteness, are entitled to accessible and affordable services. He noted efforts to include and recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Guyana, alongside a 15% targeted revenue remittance to Indigenous Peoples from the carbon-credit sales.

ROMANIA: Mircea Fechet, Minister of Environment, Water and Forests; László Borbély, State Counsellor to the Prime Minister’s Office; and Ioana Dospinescu, youth representative, noted Romania’s innovative policies and strategies, including: a national action plan, an interagency committee comprising

ministers from across the government to oversee the sustainable development strategy, and a training system to teach and accredit sustainable development experts. They outlined the strong focus given to education; efforts to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive preparation process for this VNR, as well as to improve inclusivity and coherence in policies; and the national Sustainability Code, which was established based on lessons learned from Germany's version. Noting that almost two-thirds of SDG targets have been achieved, they encouraged further efforts on developing institutional capacity and enhancing stakeholder engagement.

In response to questions by POLAND, WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP, SLOVENIA, LATVIA, CROATIA, and MONGOLIA, Borbély noted 19 minority groups are represented in the Romanian parliament, with targeted strategies to include and support marginalized groups and address gender equality. He noted the added value of the sustainable development experts, highlighting the training programme's potential for behavior changes throughout government and civil society; several projects focusing on youth engagement; a coalition for sustainable development that facilitates collaboration among civil society organizations; and ongoing challenges including the need for a functioning inter-institutional framework, and how to spur critical transformation. He encouraged sustained action, holding a Rubik's cube aloft to illustrate the interconnected nature of the SDGs.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC: Marcel Djimasse, Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reform, via video link, highlighted "modest" progress, while underlining the government's commitment to proactively pursue implementation of the SDGs. Against the backdrop of serious insecurity and worsening socioeconomic indicators, he explained efforts to integrate the SDGs into national policy frameworks, highlighting efforts to strengthen access to safe drinking water and policy frameworks for sustainable energy and infrastructure development.

Responding to questions from SWITZERLAND, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP, and DENMARK, Djimasse highlighted an ongoing programme responding to persistent insecurity, and called for increased international support, including through imposing sanctions against armed groups. On inequality, he noted new legal tools to protect vulnerable groups, as well as improvements to the institutional enabling environment to attract investors to diverse economic sectors.

CHILE: Paula Poblete, Vice-Minister of Social Evaluation, described the country's post-pandemic recovery process as a "whole-of-society" effort that took stock of all SDGs and incorporated views from different social sectors. While noting that poverty indicators had risen for the first time since 1990, she highlighted achievements include increased investment in the lithium and green hydrogen sectors, widespread adoption of disaster risk reduction approaches by local governments, and strengthened international partnerships, including through Chile's feminist foreign policy and work on marine biodiversity.

Responding to questions from BARBADOS, NGO MAJOR GROUP and FINLAND, Poblete stressed the inclusive nature of the SDG dialogue process, saying it involved more than 15 dialogue sessions across the country that brought together different civil society and private actors. She further outlined future plans to decentralize monitoring structures, reduce gender inequality and violence, and promote women's leadership in the corporate sector.

UZBEKISTAN: Sherzod Kudbiev, Minister, and Ilkhom Norkulov, Deputy Minister, Economy and Finance, presented the country's second VNR. They highlighted significant results since Uzbekistan's first VNR in 2020, including adopting a national SDG agenda with 125 targets and a focus on poverty alleviation as a top priority. On lessons learned, the presentation noted the importance of inclusive economic reforms, with a close link to skills development and providing access to market infrastructure, as well as social protection measures such as affordable housing and investments in healthcare and education. The presenters further reported improvements in women's political participation and environmental protection through more efficient use of water and land resources.

Responding to questions from MONGOLIA, TAJIKISTAN, UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM, KYRGYSTAN and KAZAKHSTAN, Kudbiev outlined: the creation of a special parliamentary commission to monitor SDG implementation; efforts to mobilize domestic financing towards the annual SDG budget of USD 6 billion through market reforms in the energy, infrastructure and agricultural sectors; improved coordination with civil society institutions; and targeted social protection for minorities and vulnerable communities. On rehabilitation of the Aral Sea region, he highlighted the greening of 1.5 million hectares.

In The Corridors

Today's Monday blues took a turn towards the somber and thoughtful, as UN head honchos opened the Ministerial Segment warning that the 2030 Agenda "is in peril," forecasting potentially difficult negotiations looking ahead to an SDG Summit they stressed should be bold and ambitious. UN Secretary-General António Guterres described successful climate action as the common denominator across all the SDGs, reiterating the SDG financing gap has risen to almost USD 4 trillion a year. In turn, UNGA President Csaba Kőrösi, spoke of the futility of "retrofitting" old-fashioned policies, market regulations, and financial institutions in a bid to spur transformation.

While most delegate presentations thereafter followed familiar ground in lauding country progress and expressing continued support for the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, some speakers did attempt to catalog insights from failures and missed opportunities to "accelerate the sustainability transformation." Yet as questions to VNR presenters revealed, many observers remain unconvinced that sufficient political will has been marshalled at this session to lead to the next concrete steps needed to be taken when the Summit convenes in September.