SDG Summit: 18 September 2023

If not with a bang, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Summit, and with it the UN Summits Week, opened with a long line-up of Heads of State and Government. Delegates adopted a Political Declaration to be submitted for consideration by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and underscored continued commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda. Calls for reforming the international finance architecture received traction across the board.

Opening Segment

Dennis Francis, President of the UNGA, opened the meeting highlighting how a combination of factors, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and the war in Ukraine, have compromised the sustainable development trajectory. He emphasized the need for transformative action, inviting Member States to announce bold commitments at the Summit.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres asserted that the 2030 Agenda is a promise to all people to “build a world of health and progress, leave no one behind—and pay for it.” Emphasizing the need for an SDG rescue plan, he called for delivering USD 500 billion per year and an effective debt relief mechanism. He urged reforming the “outdated, dysfunctional, and unfair” international financial architecture.

Paula Narváez, President of the Economic and Social Council, said the Summit should serve as a turning point to rescue the SDGs and implored delegates not to let the opportunity slip away.

Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani, QATAR, welcomed the adoption of the Political Declaration, noting it highlights resolve in addressing the most urgent challenges facing the world today, including conflict, food security crises, and climate change. Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, IRELAND, recalled that progress on the SDGs had stalled well before the pandemic, but welcomed advancement on electricity access and reduced child mortality rates. He highlighted Ireland’s commitment to provide USD 149 million in climate finance and USD 70 million for food security in 2023.

Mayada Adil, Young Leader for the SDGs, reminded delegates that achieving only 15% of SDGs “is a failure” and called for genuine intergenerational partnership and solidity, saying young people constitute half of the global population and are being left behind.

SDG implementation at the half-time – What will it take to keep the SDG promise?

Fireside chat: Moderator Gillian Tett, Financial Times, said the outcome of a match can always change in its second half. Prime Minister Mia Mottley, BARBADOS, called for “longer money” and said persistent hunger amid an abundance of food shows that “we choose not to act differently and share with one another.” Ajay Banga, President, WORLD BANK, described the Bank’s newly expanded vision and suggested redirecting fossil fuel subsidies and finding available capital to alleviate debt in emerging markets. Carolina Cosse, Mayor of MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay, said we need to work locally to achieve the SDGs, and this may require a cultural change in how decisions are made.

Statements by Groups: Cuba, for the GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA, highlighted global demand for overhauling the international financial architecture, saying the high cost of loans prevents developing countries from investing in sustainable development.

Comoros, for the AFRICAN UNION (AU), noted countries’ efforts to reach the SDGs have been hampered by external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and climate change. He emphasized that success on the 2030 Agenda and the AU Agenda 2063 will depend on resource mobilization.

Dominica, for the CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY, said compounding crises call for greater leadership at the multilateral level. He urged more support for developing countries through ensuring long-term lending at lower interest rates, debt relief, and the creation of a robust and effective sovereign debt resolution mechanism. He said that despite challenges, the 2030 Agenda remains achievable.

Botswana, for the GROUP OF LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (LLDCs), pointed to the third UN Conference on LLDCs, to be held in Rwanda in 2024, and called for the widest possible coalition to support sustainable development transformations in LLDCs.

Palau, for the PACIFIC SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES, called for adopting the multidimensional vulnerability index (MVI) to account for more than just income-based criteria in assessing eligibility for concessional finance. He pointed at compounding vulnerabilities related to size, remoteness, climate impacts, and reliance on remittance.

Sierra Leone, for the GROUP OF SEVEN PLUS, underscored that sustainable peace, effective state institutions, and access to justice are key pillars of stability, development, and resilience. He urged addressing the root causes of conflict, ensuring debt relief, and providing technology transfer.

Czechia, for the PATHFINDERS FOR PEACEFUL, JUST, AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES, emphasized promoting people-centered justice, lamented inequality within and between countries, and opined that change is possible. In his national capacity, he underscored the widespread suffering resulting from the Russian aggression against Ukraine, not just in the region but also globally due to the compounded food crisis.

Angola, for the SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY, called for ensuring the Summit is “a real turning point” that strengthens political commitment to achieve progress and fulfill climate finance promises.

The EUROPEAN UNION welcomed the UN Secretary-General’s plan for an SDG stimulus. She said the EU’s development aid increased by 30% in 2022. Noting public funding is not enough, however, she called for: reforming multilateral development banks; unlocking private capital by de-risking private investments; supporting developing countries and emerging economies in creating their own green bonds; and promoting carbon pricing. She called upon leaders to restore the promise that “tomorrow will be better for all than today.”

Nepal, for the LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES (LDCs), said the SDGs are in “dire need of rescue.” She lamented that investments in LDCs saw a sharp decline in 2022 with severe repercussions on water and sanitation, food security, health, and education, and she called for a massive scaling-up of affordable finance.

Samoa, for the ALLIANCE OF SMALL ISLAND STATES, highlighted the need to leave nationalism behind and “put action
to the rhetoric we have been propagating for years.” She called for: urgent action on climate change, including more climate finance and drastic emission cuts; and reforming the international finance architecture, building on an MVI and inclusive decision making. The Russian Federation, for the EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION (EAEU), pointed to the EAEU’s work on freedom of movement of goods and citizens and gradual harmonization of financial market regulation. In his national capacity, he condemned unilateral measures by the US and EU. He argued that the Russian Federation remains a responsible provider of energy and fertilizers. Indonesia, for the ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS, pointed to regional engagement to narrow the development gap and localize the SDGs. She emphasized building resilient supply chains, accelerating just energy transitions, investing in human resource development, and enhancing disaster risk reduction.

Mexico, for MEXICO, INDONESIA, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, TÜRKIYE, AND AUSTRALIA, said only coordinated action will propel sustainable development forward. She called for recognizing the contribution of all stakeholders and emphasized the importance of gender equality.

Leaders’ Dialogue 1 “Scaling up actions on key transitions to accelerate SDG progress”

Co-moderator Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President, KAZAKHSTAN, called for modernizing the international financial architecture and for technical support to tackle the climate, food, and energy crises.

President Zoran Milanović, CROATIA, announced plans to protect 30% of Croatia’s sea, in line with the Global Biodiversity Framework.

President Sadyr Zhaparov, KYRGYZSTAN, lamented that poverty levels have risen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and pointed to social protection mechanisms for reversing that trend.

President Cyril Ramaphosa, SOUTH AFRICA, said the most vulnerable are “carrying the costs of our inability to succeed.” He also called for the international financial architecture to be overhauled and for developing countries to gain equal access to global markets.

President Alexander van der Bellen, AUSTRIA, announced a commitment of USD 60 million to the World Food Program for the period 2023-2025, and argued that 5% of global GDP—the amount being lost to corruption—could close the SDG finance gap.

President Dina Boluarte, PERU, pointed to national progress in: expanding health insurance coverage; increasing the share of women in the workforce; and promoting biodiversity protection and a circular economy.

President Mohamed Irfaan Ali, GUYANA, highlighted the lack of progress on global partnerships (SDG 17), calling for reforming international finance institutions.

President Wesley Simna, FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA, underscored the establishment of the seventh-largest marine protected area in the world as a buffer from climate change impacts and protection for “blue carbon” ecosystems.

President Stevo Pendarovski, NORTH MACEDONIA, foregrounded investing in young peoples’ skills and education to prevent emigration, enhancing climate action, and mainstreaming the SDGs across society.

President Sauli Niinistö, FINLAND, expressed concern that “we are facing a perfect storm of interlinking challenges.” He called for engaging finance ministers in climate action and ensuring the right to education globally.

John Rosso, Deputy Prime Minister, PAPUA NEW GUINEA, highlighted the need for: greater ownership, leadership, and resource mobilization for the SDGs; and reforming the global economy and international financial architecture.

Khurelbaatar Chimed, Deputy Prime Minister, MONGOLIA, highlighted Mongolia’s commitment to equal access to basic social services for the entire population.

Zamby Abdul Kadir, Minister of Foreign Affairs, MALAYSIA, noted the need to enhance social protection networks, enable cross-border trade of renewable energy, and overcome economic disparity.

Seve Paeni, Minister of Finance, TUVALU, highlighted the government’s long-term adaptation plan to address sea-level rise, which is projected to leave most of his country untenable for human habitation by 2100. He urged grant-based funding to provide safe land territory for Tuvalu’s population.

Amin Liew Abdullah, Minister of Finance and Economy, BRUNEI, emphasized protecting the most vulnerable; implementing climate change commitments; strengthening institutions for SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production); and pushing for actionable energy transition solutions.

Catherine Collona, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, FRANCE, remarked that “no way out of poverty is sustainable without protecting the planet” and invited additional countries to join the Paris Pact for People and Planet.

Andoulaye Bio Tchané, Minister for State Development and Government Affairs, GUINEA, directed attention to national advancements in: increasing access to electricity; expanding fiber networks; and rolling out universal healthcare.

Seedy Keita, Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, THE GAMBIA, explained how his country has mainstreamed the SDGs through a national development plan, and stressed the importance of rethinking food production strategies along the entire value chain to achieve zero hunger.

Márcio Costa Macêdo, President of the National Commission for the SDGs, BRAZIL, announced that Brazil has “once again joined the effort to build a fairer and more sustainable planet” after six years of setbacks, noting that deforestation in the Amazon decreased by 48% during the first eight months of 2023.

Hassan Shoukry Selim, Minister for Foreign Affairs, EGYPT, lamented the food, energy and energy insecurity are raging developing countries and warning that those states’ indebtedness jeopardizes the SDGs.

Valeri Belski, Vice-speaker of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly, BELARUS, stressed the country’s role as donor of fertilizer and dairy products to achieve food security.

Summarizing the discussion, Achim Steiner, Administrator, UN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP), noted agreement that “change is difficult but remains possible.” He highlighted progress through the “connectivity revolution” underway across the globe, and the global proliferation of renewable energy. He pointed out that merely 1% of the global market in equity and bonds could fund the SDGs.

Andrew Morley, President, WORLD VISION, emphasized the plight of many children in crisis-stricken areas, calling for children to be placed at the heart of SDG implementation efforts and ensuring that no child has to suffer from hunger.

Leaders’ Dialogue 2 “Building resilience and leaving no one behind”

Co-moderator Andrej Duda, President, POLAND, highlighted that social safety nets are key to building resilience. Co-moderator Philip J. Pierre, Prime Minister, SAINT LUCIA, called for a people-centered and human rights-based approach to the SDGs.

President Gustavo Petro, COLOMBIA, proposed holding two peace conferences to deal with the Palestinian and Ukrainian conflicts, and urged restructuring of the international financial system.

President Chandrikapersad Santokhi, SURINAME, outlined his country’s support for vulnerable groups in remote areas, focusing on gender equality and equity.

President Maia Sandu, MOLDOVA, highlighted how her country has improved its SDG ranking despite challenges resulting from Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.

President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, PORTUGAL, called for increased global finance for SDG implementation and pointed to debt swap pilot schemes.

President Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera, MALAWI, said the war in Eastern Europe is one in a series of shocks that have devastated Malawi’s economy and increased poverty. He stressed that digital innovations are key for fostering inclusive development.

Rashad Mohammed al-Alimi, Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council, YEMEN, said “war has changed our priorities” and marginalized development efforts in favor of securing medicine, food, and oil exports.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz, GERMANY, emphasized that a reform of the international financial architecture, especially the World Bank, is underway, and said Germany will provide over EUR 300 million in hybrid capital for the World Bank to leverage
investments. He pointed to targeted cooperation agreements to ensure renewable energy production.

Prime Minister Juan Antonio Briceno, BELIZE, said the SDGs remain the only ambitious, universally agreed blueprint for an equitable and sustainable future for all. He noted Belize’s commitment towards poverty reduction and marine protection, and called for international financial reform and the adoption of the MSF.

President Pedro Sánchez, SPAIN, announced a new law to contribute 0.7% of its GNI to official development assistance (ODA) by 2030, as well as support for the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to ensure food security.

Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre, SOMALIA, presented advances in poverty alleviation, reduced maternal mortality, and increased literacy for young women. He pointed to sustainable agricultural practices, improved water resource management, and food security as priorities.

Antonio Tajani, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, ITALY, observed that “the situation in Africa is not about to explode, it has already exploded.” He stressed that migration is “beyond control” and vowed to step up the fight against human traffickers, the “merchants of death.”

Enrique Manalo, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, the PHILIPPINES, outlined his country’s commitment to ensure resilience by establishing robust disaster risk reduction and rehabilitation programmes.

Aarar Mrizoyan, Minister for Foreign Affairs, ARMENIA, noted that good governance and transparency are key to SDG implementation.

Jauwahie Badaidhe, Minister of Environment, JORDAN, showcased how Jordan has created the largest cash transfer programme in the region, amounting to 0.7% of the country’s GDP, in an effort to tackle poverty.

Mamoud Samake, Minister of Environment and Sanitation, MALI, pointed to tackling the roots and consequences of terrorism and internal conflict as national priorities, and called on developed countries to step up funding efforts.

Franz Tattenbach Capra, Minister of Environment and Energy, COSTA RICA, urged delegates to focus development efforts not only on urban areas, but on all regions.

Ian Borg, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade, MALTA, highlighted the coordination challenges arising from the SDGs’ cross-cutting nature.

Penelope Beckles-Robinson, Minister of Planning and Development, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, expressed concern over the “bleak prospects” of fulfilling the SDGs in the face of rampant climate change and global instability, lamenting small island developing states remain “trapped in a maze of exogenous shocks.”

Abdelhak Saihi, Minister of Health, ALGERIA, reported that his country has invested more than USD 2.5 million to address the needs of priority regions in the 2015-2022 period.

Park Jin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, showcased the government’s efforts across three areas: unprecedented increases in funding; leveraging quality education; and narrowing the digital divide.

Filippo Grandi, UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, said millions of people are on the move, emphasizing that refugees and hosts need assistance after the shock.

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Executive Director, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR POLICY RESEARCH AND EDUCATION, said a human rights-based approach is key to going beyond the “pathetic 15%” of SDG achievement. She also observed that hunger and poverty in Indigenous territories can be overcome if Indigenous peoples’ rights and control are protected.

Martin Chungong, Secretary-General, INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION (IPU), identified the deterioration of politics both nationally and globally as a key reason the SDGs are off-track. He said the IPU is helping parliaments become more open, accountable, and transparent and reflective of their societies, especially for women, youth, and other marginalized groups.

**Leaders’ Dialogue 3 “Applying science, technology, innovation, and data for transformative action”**

Co-moderator William Samoei Ruto, President of KENYA, said technology and science are vastly underused resources, and emphasized building on science, technology, innovation (STI), and data to foster climate-inclusive, efficient, and effective citizen-centric public delivery systems.

Co-moderator Nataša Pirc Musar, President of SLOVENIA, noted challenges posed by artificial intelligence (AI), which replicates sexist and racist contents, and called for a global fight against misinformation and disinformation to protect democracy.

Opening the speakers list, President Alain Berset, SWITZERLAND, emphasized that science can provide solutions to the country’s 2030 Agenda. He noted that central accelerating factors: a strong multilateral system based on solidarity; efficient international financial architecture; and better use of STI.

Prince Alois of LIECHTENSTEIN underscored the immense potential of STI and delineated challenges to be overcome, including unequal access, gender digital gaps, and cyber warfare.

President Rumen Radev, BULGARIA, noted the need for a free, open, and secure digital world and highlighted efforts to make Bulgaria “smart, green, digital, and connected.”

President Alar Karis, ESTONIA, underscored his country’s commitment to sharing its “e-experience” with least developed countries and other partners so as to make a human-rights-centered digital approach accessible to all.

President Gitanas Našėda, LITHUANIA, called for more advances in e-mobility and smart transport to support the eventual end of fossil fuel subsidies in every country.

President Edgar Rinkūvičius, REPUBLIC OF LATVIA, emphasized engaging more women and girls in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), as well as his country’s commitment to increase investment in research and development to 1.5% of GDP per year by 2027.

Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja, UGANDA, pointed to her government’s focus on: e-mobility; air quality monitoring; productivity for rural households; and agricultural industrialization.

Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka, FIJI, stressed the importance of harnessing data and statistics for measuring and monitoring purposes, including through the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and the SDG Tracker.

Prime Minister Kossi ‘Oifikakahofalu Vovate, TONGA, urged improving infrastructure in an inclusive and careful manner so as to leave no one behind and mitigate environmental risks.

President Alberto Fernández, ARGENTINA, noted the technology gap between developing and developed nations, bolstered by technological monopolies and unilateral coercive measures. He reiterated Argentina’s intention to join global markets while protecting its workers from a race to the bottom in terms of salaries and working conditions.

François Fayot, Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs, LUXEMBOURG, stressed that GDP growth alone is a poor indicator of prosperity. He announced his country’s support for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to develop a new international standardized wellbeing index that takes social and environmental factors into account next to economic ones.

Sayyid Badr Albusaidi, Foreign Minister, OMAN, called for complementarity and collaboration among sectors to harness the power of technology, science, and innovation.

Prime Minister Ntsokhoane Samuel Matekane, LESOTHO, lamented that efforts to fight poverty have stalled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He announced prioritizing SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and empowering women to participate in digital innovation.

Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, DJIBOUTI, recognized that several countries lack access to emergent technologies and called for developing countries to obtain a significant share of the growing markets for electric vehicles and green hydrogen.

Ricardo Salgado, Minister of Planning, HONDURAS, said hate speech is the seed of most ills and exacerbates inequality in Latin America, noting that gaps in education and technology are widening and urging for equal opportunities for all.

Oman Saleh Mohammed, Minister of Foreign Affairs, ERITREA, highlighted STI as a driver for sustainable development, noting the challenge of discerning truly transformative change amid incremental evolution and hype.

Prime Minister Mohammad Ibrahim Shatayeh, PALESTINE, called for collaboration and practical measures to overcome multiple crises, foster an environment conducive to regional peace, and urged not to leave Palestine behind.
Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Secretary-General, INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION (ITU), pointed to the SDG Digital Acceleration Agenda launched during the SDG Action Weekend.

Barbara Del Castello, UN MAJOR GROUP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH, underscored the role of youth as entry points to the future and game changers in the field of STI, especially in the Global South.

Ingrid Scholz, Co-chair of the Independent Group of Scientists writing the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR), said the GSDR outlines the need for course correction and acceleration and identifies key systemic interventions to ensure a successful transformation.

In closing, Co-Moderator Musar underscored the importance of building trust among countries and peoples and fighting misinformation and misinformation.

**Leaders’ Dialogue 4 “Strengthening integrated policies and public institutions for achieving the SDGs”**

Co-Moderator Mette Frederiksen, Prime Minister, DENMARK, called for political will to address the inequalities of the international financial system, noting developing countries need a bigger voice and more investment.

Co-Moderator Mark Brown, Prime Minister, COOK ISLANDS, called for more robust follow-up and review of the SDGs to ensure constant progress.

Alessandro Scarano and Adele Tonnini, Captains Regent, SAN MARINO, said climate change should be addressed with the same urgency and determination that governments brought to the COVID-19 crisis, including by accelerating science and technology.

President Zuzana Čaputová, SLOVAKIA, said that while the COVID-19 pandemic slowed SDG progress, it cannot be an excuse for having so few of the targets on track. She showcased her efforts to address interlinkages between goals, by offering new jobs in coal-producing regions while ending coal production to improve environmental and health outcomes.

President Bajram Begaj, ALBANIA, said Russia’s military aggression in Ukraine disrupts food stability for the most vulnerable and jeopardizes SDG attainment, noting his Parliament adopted a resolution on SDG commitment as part of the EU integration process.

President José Ramos-Horta, TIMOR LESTE, reported on the substantial advancements achieved by his country in the 21 years since its independence, reminding delegates of the vulnerability of small countries to global crises, as experienced during the 2007 financial crisis “obliteration” of ODA.

President Jakov Milatović, MONTENEGRO, presented various national policies furthering the SDGs, including labor market reforms and free school books for primary students. He underlined that the SDGs are “a promise to every region, every community, and every citizen.”

Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, GEORGIA, underscored mainstreaming SDGs into national policies and collaborating with municipalities.

Prime Minister José Ulisses Correia e Silva, CABO VERDE, stressed his country’s determination to eradicate extreme poverty by 2026 and outlined various programmes in the educational, health, and social sectors, among others.

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