

HLPF 2024 Highlights: Monday, 15 July 2024

The ministerial segment of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) held under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was marked by a series of calls for a frank acknowledgement of the lack of progress towards the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These calls were underlined by references to the plight of Gaza, Ukraine, Haiti, South Sudan, and other areas experiencing conflict and climate-induced threats. Delegates urged for leveraging the urgency of this “fragile and special” moment to integrate and accelerate progress using a series of upcoming international conferences, including the Summit of the Future and its intended outcome, the Pact for the Future. In the afternoon, six countries presented their third Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports, and one presented their fourth VNR. Many delegates also looked forward to the contribution of the Summit and upcoming conferences, including the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, and the second World Summit on Social Development, to advancing and accelerating progress, notably addressing gaps in finance, debt, capacity, and strains in the multilateral system.

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

This morning segment was ushered in with a performance by Chilean-American tenor, Jonathan Tetelman, accompanied by Canadian pianist Bryan Wagon.

Noting that progress on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs has stalled, particularly affecting the most vulnerable, ECOSOC President Paula Narváez called for the Political Declaration of the 2023 SDG Summit to be “translated into action.” She urged a commitment to sustainable development as a fundamental prerequisite for building resilience in conflict zones.

Dennis Francis, President, UN General Assembly, underlined the need for an equitable financial system that will address the crippling debt crisis and secure the SDGs’ prospects, especially in least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries, and small island developing states (SIDS). He stressed the Summit of the Future should be genuinely transformative, reignite public confidence, and mend the deficit of trust among Member States, and between governments and peoples.

Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General, urged Member States to:

- promote peace and end spending on war;
- advance the green and energy transitions, and transform food systems;

- expand access to digital connectivity for everyone everywhere, including access to education and skills training;
- accelerate action on finance - the “fuel of development”; and
- double down on the central SDG promise of “leaving no one behind,” stressing that the SDGs are not about aggregates but about transforming all lives.

She underlined the Summit of the Future as a critical opportunity to address these issues and said the SDGs can promote unity in today’s divided world.

Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile, and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, acknowledged the stark reality of ongoing conflict, human rights violations, and extreme poverty, but also stressed another reality where “change is happening fast, improving the lives of many.” Bachelet underscored that the triple planetary crisis presents an opportunity to rethink economies and societies. She described the Summit of the Future as a once in a generation opportunity for moving to a reinvigorated multilateral system.

Sameh Kamel, Organizing Partner, Major Group for Children and Youth, presented recommendations from the youth preparatory processes towards the HLPF, calling for:

- committing to a new collective quantified goal on climate finance, aligned with countries’ nationally determined contributions and national adaptation plans;
- adopting strategies and dedicated funding for youth’s peace and security agenda, including by protecting civic spaces for young;
- guaranteeing young people’s access to sexual and reproductive health free from stigma and discrimination; and
- reforming the international financial architecture, including providing seats for youth on the boards of multilateral development banks.

General Debate on “From the SDG Summit to the Summit of the Future”

Chair Narváez opened the high-level debate, reflecting back on the 2023 SDG Summit, and looking ahead to the Summit of the Future in September 2024. During the discussion, recurring themes included calls for the reform of international finance architecture, as well as expressions of hope for the outcomes of the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development and the second World Summit for Social Development.

Uganda, for G77/CHINA, stressed that with only 17% of SDG targets on track, urgent action is needed to translate commitments from the SDG Summit into concrete outcomes through, among others, strengthened international collaboration, international financial architecture reform, and shifting to a comprehensive

“beyond gross domestic product (GDP)” framework to monitor SDG progress.

Lao PDR, for the ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS, identified key regional priorities as: localizing the SDGs; building more resilient infrastructure; accelerating the just energy transition; and scaling up regional cooperation on disaster risk reduction. Recalling the devastating impacts of Hurricane Beryl, Belize, for the CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY, stressed that the region cannot continue to pay the price and called for major emitters to be held accountable. He said operationalizing the Fund for responding to loss and damage is an opportunity to ensure climate justice and rebuild trust in the multilateral system.

Cabo Verde, for the AFRICAN GROUP, stressed that deepening global inequality calls for an integrated, innovative, and urgent response to mobilize much-needed resources. Reaffirming the region’s commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the African Union’s 2063 “The Africa We Want” Agenda, he called for “solid international support” through foreign direct investment, debt alleviation, and better access to international markets.

Belarus, for the FRIENDS OF THE FAMILY, stressed that the 2030 Agenda cannot be achieved without the empowerment of families, pointing to the UN’s role in research and awareness raising to this end.

Vanuatu, for PACIFIC SIDS, welcomed operationalization of the Fund for responding to loss and damage; delivery by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea of an Advisory Opinion on country obligations to reduce emissions and safeguard marine ecosystems; and adoption of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS, as key milestones.

Nepal, for LDCs, expressed concern about widening global inequality, with an estimated 250 million people affected by hunger and malnutrition, and 70% of deaths due to climate disasters occurring in LDCs. He urged urgent implementation of the Doha Programme of Action on LDCs, with a focus on: debt sustainability, and support to respond to global trade disruptions and partnerships to prioritize investments in key social sectors.

Emphasizing the role of effective global partnerships, Mexico, speaking for the MIKTA GROUP (MEXICO, INDONESIA, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, TÜRKIYE, and AUSTRALIA), called for strengthening the VNR process by enhancing interaction and fostering the exchange of experiences.

Malta, for the UN LGBTI CORE GROUP, highlighted the historic and important role of LGBTI+ persons, human rights defenders, and civil society in advancing the SDGs.

Ireland, on behalf of the PATHFINDERS/SDG 16+ GROUP, stressed the cross-cutting impacts of violence and conflicts, and urged rebuilding trust and the social contract between people and the institutions mandated to serve them.

Samoa, for the ALLIANCE OF SMALL ISLAND STATES, underlined that SIDS are on the frontlines of climate change disasters, and called on the international community to honor commitments, including in support of post-disaster rebuilding efforts.

China, on behalf of the GROUP OF FRIENDS OF THE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE, underlined the need for development-oriented and revitalized partnerships for bringing the 2030 Agenda back on track, and highlighted the role of capacity building to enhance the food self-sufficiency of developing countries.

Jamaica, for the GROUP OF FRIENDS OF CHILDREN AND SDGs, stressed the far-reaching impacts of intergenerational

cycles of poverty, calling for scaled-up and effective investments in children’s human rights and access to fundamental services.

UGANDA noted her country’s development plans are guided by commitments set out at the 2023 SDG Summit. YEMEN described the cycle of protracted conflict that has destroyed national infrastructure, denied schooling for millions of children, and undermined hopes for development, freedom, and the rule of law. SPAIN described the Summit of the Future as an opportunity to strengthen multilateralism, peace, and human rights; move the world away from fossil fuels; and go beyond GDP as a measure of sustainable development. TAJIKISTAN called for enhanced international cooperation and underlined the crucial importance of financial and technical support. Describing climate change as a kind of pandemic, PALAU urged a similar collective global and partnership approach to the SDGs.

The EU noted the impact of global uncertainty and geopolitical tensions, and asserted the imperative of peaceful and just societies under the rule of law as fundamental conditions for sustainable development. BRAZIL reaffirmed a commitment to a world free from hunger and inequalities, and invited support for President Lula’s proposal for an 18th SDG on promoting ethnic-racial equality. COLOMBIA underlined peace as a fundamental pillar of the 2030 Agenda, including peace with nature. Deploring the war in Gaza and its regional repercussions, OMAN called for impartial diplomacy and mediation to resolve ongoing international conflicts. CABO VERDE welcomed developments on the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index. BELIZE noted that enhanced climate resilience is imperative, with Hurricane Beryl demonstrating how much one event can set a country back. SAUDI ARABIA urged developing a prioritization mechanism to enable focus on challenges that can be addressed immediately and quickly.

The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO outlined national programmes for high-quality healthcare and provision of free education. He lamented “a war of aggression by Rwanda” hindering progress on SDGs in his country. SIERRA LEONE underlined her country’s new development plan, with food security, human capital development, and job creation as key focal areas ahead of 2030. CAMBODIA discussed progress on SDGs 1 and 2 (eradicating poverty and zero hunger) through establishment of social protection programmes for vulnerable communities, sustainable practices such as crop diversification, and increased investment in agriculture.

ECUADOR reported national measures to strengthen economic inclusion for those living in poverty and with disabilities, including efforts to guarantee a social protection floor. He underlined that “if we care better for young people, they are less likely to fall into the hands of organized crime.”

The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC stressed the international financial architecture must be able to provide resources to those countries currently bearing the brunt of climate change. MADAGASCAR lamented that much of the progress in strengthening national healthcare and education systems was reversed by the effects of multiple crises. GUINEA said the process of drafting his country’s 2024 VNR enabled them to identify progress in the SDGs, and noted his country’s graduation to lower-middle-income status.

HONDURAS reported his country had: built eight new hospitals; rebuilt 2,500 schools and significantly reduced illiteracy levels; created over 300,000 jobs; declared energy access as a human right; and established a women’s affairs unit.

ANGOLA reviewed his country's progress in areas such as water and energy, and called for strengthened means of implementation to fight against poverty. The US noted her country's role in championing diplomacy and leadership on the SDGs, sharing efforts to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth, including those in support of women and girls.

BAHRAIN underlined the role of the Arab League Summit and regional solidarity as key to building economic partnership, cooperation, and humanitarian action. LIBYA recounted efforts to construct strong national institutions with a focus on peace and justice, especially the protection of children.

NORWAY observed that the multilateral system requires trust if it is to prosper. She called for the Summit of the Future to reinvigorate and redefine multilateral cooperation.

INDIA said 135 million people in his country have escaped absolute poverty through the use of social safety networks, infrastructure development, and inclusion. NIGERIA called for urgent reform of international financial architecture and a rules-based equitable trading system, citing measures such as debt swaps. KAZAKHSTAN noted the SDGs are now integral to his country's national policy, aimed at the wellbeing of all citizens.

ESTONIA cautioned that the SDGs cannot be achieved while climate change, inequality, and conflict persist, noting that food has become a propaganda weapon for some. She decried the structural outcomes of multilateral architecture that enable a permanent member of the Security Council to attack a neighbor and then use its veto power.

The GAMBIA recounted efforts to mainstream the SDGs into national planning, and called for enhanced access to international finance for development to address debt and food security.

KUWAIT called for regional and international efforts to address cross-border issues. GHANA noted that the world is at an inflection point, and "must choose between breakdown or breakthrough" at the Summit of the Future. FINLAND underlined sustainable development and equality go hand in hand, and highlighted the impact of his country's school meals programmes which improve food security, access to education, and gender equality.

SWITZERLAND called for, among others: transformative, holistic, and inclusive approaches; an efficient and transparent international financial architecture that incorporates effectiveness of funds and limits fragmentation; and trustworthy, comparable data for drafting SDG policies.

ZIMBABWE highlighted her country's National Development Strategy 2021-2025 and Vision 2030, and called for reforming the multilateral system to enable support for government and stakeholder commitments.

BOTSWANA described her country's focus on increasing food productivity and distribution to all, implementing community-based initiatives for climate change adaptation and resilience building, and scaling up child-friendly policies.

BELARUS outlined efforts including the second national forum for sustainable development and, noting his country is now 34th globally in achieving SDGs, expressed readiness to share their experiences with others.

The STATE OF PALESTINE, noting preparations for the Summit of the Future, underlined that his country's present is one of agony, with everyone in Gaza being left behind despite the pledge to "leave no one behind."

GERMANY stressed there is no alternative to global partnerships and rules-based multilateralism and said the Pact

for the Future will make the UN "fit for the future." ROMANIA called for the Summit of the Future to reset the multilateral system to address current major challenges and identify solutions to new ones, enshrining youth involvement.

ESWATINI highlighted national efforts including increased investment in social protection and youth empowerment programmes, alongside ongoing preparatory work to establish an unemployment fund.

The PHILIPPINES discussed national measures to combat hunger and malnutrition including through financial assistance programmes, and called for adequate finance and technology transfer for developing countries.

GUATEMALA urged for increased investment in healthcare, education, the public sector, and the productive sector. He described several national initiatives to decrease poverty and malnutrition through improved water security, access to micro credit, and investment in the agricultural sector.

Voluntary National Reviews

Seven countries presented VNRs in the afternoon in a segment chaired by Tarek Ladeb, ECOSOC Vice-President (Tunisia), and Kairat Umarov, ECOSOC Vice-President (Kazakhstan). Uganda, Spain, Peru, Lao PDR, Armenia, and Nepal presented their VNRs for the third time, and Azerbaijan presented their fourth VNR report.

UGANDA: Robinah Nabbanja, Prime Minister of Uganda, highlighted the development of the current SDG-aligned five-year strategic plan, as well as initiatives to strengthen national statistics systems and localize the SDGs. She further outlined initiatives to: integrate subsistence farmers into the formal economy; reduce maternal and infant mortality rates; and strengthen SDG monitoring and reporting.

Discussion: Following questions from the NETHERLANDS, ZIMBABWE, NORWAY, and the WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP, Nabbanja highlighted actions to: enhance climate early-warning systems and restore wetlands; manage debt levels through enhanced domestic resource mobilization and strengthen international partnerships; and prioritize agro-industrialization programmes to bolster food systems.

SPAIN: A four-member team representing different governance levels presented the VNR report, with additional insights offered by several stakeholder representatives. Teresa Ribera Rodriguez, Third Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, noted progress in: Spain's energy transition; increasing official development assistance; reducing inequalities; and strengthening multi-level coalitions to advance the 2030 Agenda.

Pablo Businduy Amador, Minister for Social Rights, Consumer Affairs, and the 2030 Agenda, discussed how a new social contract is tackling child poverty among other structural inequalities. Maria Chivite Navascués, President, Chartered Community of Navarra, highlighted achievements in localizing the 2030 Agenda, including through a focus on intergenerational equity.

Isabel Iparraguirre, Vice President, Sustainable Development Council, noted that despite positive progress in several social development indicators, there has been regression in other areas. She said the VNR process offered an opportunity to create "a truly transformative development model."

Discussion: Responding to questions from SOUTH AFRICA, CHILE, and the NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS MAJOR GROUP, the team highlighted, among others:

- efforts to ensure the energy transition leaves no one behind by focusing on a phased approach and identifying potential risks for the most vulnerable;
- the establishment of a joint permanent parliamentary commission as a non-legislative and multistakeholder space for debate, coordination, and follow-through on SDG implementation; and
- the role of local governments in translating the universal SDG agenda to local realities.

PERU: Diego Belevan, Deputy Permanent Representative of Peru to the UN, highlighted a review of SDG statistical indicators as part of the VNR report, noting it helped enhance understanding of local challenges in SDG compliance. Among key achievements, he identified: alignment of Peru's 2050 vision to the SDGs; progress in the SDG indicators – reaching 51% of the international SDG indicator framework; and notable progress on water and sanitation access and affordable energy targets.

Discussion: Responding to questions from ECUADOR, PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES STAKEHOLDER GROUP, COSTA RICA, and CANADA, Belevan noted a focus on potential opportunities and risks in Peru's planning processes. Conceding that poverty eradication remains one of the foremost challenges, he highlighted efforts to transition to a multidimensional poverty index to enhance alignment across the SDGs, as well as enhanced collaboration with several Indigenous Peoples territories on biodiversity protection initiatives.

LAO PDR: Saleumxay Kommasith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lao PDR, reported on the adoption of an additional national SDG on unexploded ordnances. He highlighted positive trends on 11 SDGs, and regression on SDGs 16 (peaceful and inclusive societies) and 17 (partnerships for the Goals). On key lessons learned, he noted the importance of strong national commitment, including through a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, comprehensive localization of the SDGs, and sustained resource mobilization.

Discussion: Following questions from the PHILIPPINES, INDONESIA, the ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION (CSO) ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM, VIETNAM, and IRELAND, Kommasith outlined: continuing economic challenges due to COVID-19 and debt issues; his government's intention to prioritize and mainstream the most off-track SDGs in the next socioeconomic development plan; and the national "smooth transition" strategy to align his country's expected graduation to middle-income status with the SDGs.

AZERBAIJAN: Sahib Mammadov, Deputy Minister of Economy, Azerbaijan, underlined on his country's "remarkable ability" to adapt its SDG policies to a dynamic global landscape. Noting that Azerbaijan is one of the five most heavily-mined countries in the world, he highlighted the adoption of a national 18th SDG on demining, calling on other mine-affected countries to support this initiative. Mammadov also noted progress in:

- reintegrating post-conflict areas, with co-benefits for other SDGs;
- improvements in national statistical indicators;
- strengthening overall policy coherence;
- leveraging diverse funding sources for the SDGs; and
- fostering global dialogue for enhanced climate action as host of the 2024 UN Climate Conference.

Discussion: In response to questions from TURKIYE, SAUDI ARABIA, QATAR, HUNGARY, and the ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE CSO ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM, Mammadov reported his country had conducted a SDG budget alignment programme, and highlighted the role of integrated financial frameworks based on a "SDG investment map" in identifying investment opportunities. He concluded that the multifaceted approaches taken had helped increase transparency in stakeholder engagement.

ARMENIA: Ararat Mirzoyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Armenia, focused on the nexus between humanitarian, development, and peace actions as a core theme in his country's VNR. He stressed the severe consequences of multiple intersecting crises. Mirzoyan noted that the establishment of a social emergency support system had led to decreased unemployment rates. He also highlighted initiatives to form an inter-agency coordination council to measure progress towards the Paris Agreement, and noted efforts to build peace, establish diplomatic relations, and open transport routes in the region.

Discussion: Following interventions from GERMANY, GREECE, INDIA, TURKIYE, LITHUANIA, AZERBAIJAN, the LGBTI STAKEHOLDER GROUP, MEXICO, LEBANON, and UZBEKISTAN, Mirzoyan addressed: innovative efforts to combine the SDGs with government measures; priority economic reforms, including inflation targeting; efforts to increase the independence of the judiciary; and Armenia's goal of normalizing relations with Azerbaijan and Turkiye.

NEPAL: Lok Bahadur Thapa, Permanent Representative of Nepal to the UN, said the VNR followed a participatory approach through increased civil society ownership of the SDGs. Noting the alignment of the SDGs with his country's development plan, he outlined progress made in advancing social inclusion and access to healthcare and education. Thapa further noted concern regarding slower progress in tackling hunger and climate change mitigation, and in overcoming financial dependencies and poor institutional capacities. He underlined that priority areas moving forward are policy coherence, increasing localization, and regular monitoring.

Discussion: Responding to questions posed by INDIA, ERITREA, the MAJOR GROUP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH, SWITZERLAND, and FINLAND, Thapa reported:

- increasing financial pressures due to Nepal's debt-to-GDP ratio;
- the importance of disaggregated data, as data "has the power to guide or misguide" public policies; and
- efforts to continue aligning the SDGs with Nepal's expected graduation to the middle-income country category.

In the Corridors

The Canadian-Chilean collaboration that brought the tenor, Jonathan Tetelman, to help launch the ministerial segment of the HLPF proved to be the high point of the day for connoisseurs of the opera and the sublime. Observers noted that the beauty, drama, and pathos of the Chilean-born opera star's performance only served to underline the business-as-usual tone hit by the erstwhile heads of government, ministers, and other senior delegates. As one observer remarked, "the faltering status" of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda suggests an "unrequited love that could match the tragic heights of Madama Butterfly."