

## HLPF 2025 Highlights: Monday, 21 July 2025

The High-level Segment of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and Ministerial segment of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) opened with keynote addresses by Bob Rae, President, ECOSOC, UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, and Philémon Yang, President, UN General Assembly. Carolina Rojas delivered a message from the Children and Youth Major Group.

For the rest of the day, ministers and other high-level representatives of Member States, regional groupings and other interest groups, delivered statements during the General Debate,, while presentations on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) continued in parallel in the afternoon.

### Opening of the High-level Segment

In his opening address, Bob Rae, President, ECOSOC, noted this year's HLPF is convening against a backdrop of "enormous global disruption," and stressed that this is not the time to abandon ideals "but to double down" on solidarity. Recalling the adoption of the UN Charter during a similar "terrible dark period," he challenged delegates to match UN founding members' commitment to "not just aspirations, but obligations" to, *inter alia*: address poverty and other root causes of inequality and conflict; promote higher standards of living not just at home but everywhere; pursue freedom for all without distinction; and learn "how to stop ignoring and hating each other."

António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, welcomed progress at three recent global events – the World Health Assembly, the UN Ocean Conference and the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) – suggesting the outcomes are not isolated wins, but signs of momentum that demonstrate that "multilateralism can deliver." Urging HLPF 2025 to recognize the deep linkages between development and peace, he condemned the recent "atrocious and inhumane" killings in Gaza and called for increased international collaboration to advance peace in the Middle East and other conflict zones. Among critical steps to accelerate the SDGs in their remaining five years, Guterres emphasized the need to:

- reform the unfair global financial system as set out in the FfD4 [Sevilla Commitment](#);
- strengthen and scale partnerships that deliver; and
- embed long-term thinking into every declaration.

Describing VNRs as templates for joint learning, the Secretary-General lauded countries for producing more than 400 VNRs to

date, noting more than 150 countries have completed at least two SDG reviews.

Philémon Yang, President, UN General Assembly, outlined key measures included in the [Sevilla Commitment](#) and the [Pact for the Future](#) that aim to reinvigorate multilateralism, suggesting the HLPF can be a platform for implementation policy, guided by science and evidence in the spirit of global solidarity and collaboration. He added that VNRs are a testament to countries' progress and their collective commitment to implementation.

Carolina Rojas, Technology Focal Point, CHILDREN AND YOUTH MAJOR GROUP, spoke on areas where youth participation is essential, including to protect children and youth from oppression and harassment in the data-driven, no-consent world of social media, and ensure the inclusion of migrant youth in labor markets. Noting that sustainable development requires equitable distribution of resources and power, she called for multilateral frameworks that address unsustainable debt, including through debt cancellation and long-term financial support to grassroots organizations, who are "the first to respond and last to get paid."

### General Debate

More than 70 ministers and other high-level representatives of Member States, regional groupings, and interest groups delivered statements for the rest of the day, with morning and afternoon sessions chaired by Bob Rae, President, ECOSOC, and Krzysztof Szczerski, Vice-President, ECOSOC, respectively.

Many speakers, including CANADA, PERU, ESWATINI, BULGARIA, KYRGYZSTAN, PANAMA, MALAWI, QATAR, HONDURAS, ITALY, PORTUGAL, MALI, EQUATORIAL GUINEA, CYPRUS, MAURITANIA, SAUDI ARABIA, SURINAME, EQUATORIAL GUINEA, ETHIOPIA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, KAZAKHSTAN, THE GAMBIA, and ZAMBIA, reaffirmed their strong commitment to the 2030 Agenda and to multilateralism.

IRELAND described the ongoing UN80 review process as an opportunity to focus on the UN's unique expertise and boost their financial stability, while CZECHIA commented that "when SDGs fall behind so does prosperity, peace and trust." Many also welcomed the ongoing UN80 process, stressing the need for a strengthened UN as a beacon of hope and catalyst for change amid escalating and interrelated global crises.

UGANDA, FINLAND, the CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY, Palau for AOSIS, and others supported reforming the multilateral system to ensure the UN is fit-for-purpose in the face of growing conflict and the need to accelerate SDG implementation.

FINLAND, along with many other speakers, underscored the

multilateral system must protect human rights in the face of conflicts, as in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan, that are violating the UN Charter.

THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION aligned themselves with the “Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative” to accelerate the SDGs, calling for a realistic post-2030 agenda.

URUGUAY expressed hope that HLPF 2025 would reaffirm multilateralism by adopting the Ministerial Declaration by consensus.

Referring to the 2024 Summit of the Future, INDONESIA offered four specific actions to restore trust in multilateralism: a focus on social inclusion and leaving no one behind; scaling up game-changing solutions, such as blue economy approaches and digital transformation focusing on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises; enhanced knowledge sharing; and acting urgently and in synergy.

Speaking for PACIFIC SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS), Tuvalu underscored the leadership of “big Ocean states” and called for strengthened international collaboration to address systemic challenges, including through operationalization of the Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index and the Loss and Damage Fund.

SLOVAKIA, TÜRKIYE, and others welcomed the upcoming Second World Summit for Social Development as an opportunity to accelerate inclusive development.

On much-needed reform of the global financial architecture, many speakers, such as PAKISTAN, IRAQ, CONGO, Nepal, for LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES (LDCs), SIERRA LEONE, the Philippines, for ASEAN, and HONDURAS, called for swift implementation of the Sevilla Commitment adopted at FfD4. Speaking for the GROUP OF 77 (G77)/CHINA, Iraq called for recognition of countries’ development aspirations. Saint Kitts and Nevis, for the CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM), called for Ocean funding for SIDS and coordinated action for gender equality. KENYA called for a focus on both financial and non-financial means of implementation to advance the SDGs.

ITALY, SPAIN, PORTUGAL, and GERMANY, among many other countries, highlighted efforts to restructure their development assistance in line with the Sevilla Commitment.

PORTUGAL enumerated their technical support for developing countries focused on Ocean governance, digital transformation, and outer space. SPAIN highlighted their firm backing of voluntary contributions to the joint SDG Fund and the Sevilla Commitment.

LESOTHO underscored the need for financing to enhance disaster risk reduction. Kuwait, for the GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL, commended developing countries, including Qatar, on their commitments to enhance partnerships and equitable mechanisms.

CHINA discussed the 83-member Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative, calling for developed countries to fulfil their Official Development Assistance and climate financing commitments.

Belarus, for the EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION, outlined how economic integration accelerates SDG implementation.

A common thread across the country presentations was the highlighting of specific SDG successes, with a focus on the five focal SDGs at HLPF 2025. Speakers mentioned, *inter alia*:

- scaling up universal health care and other social protection measures to ensure no one is left behind;
- policy and legislative reforms to address gender inequality and other entrenched challenges;
- efforts to integrate the SDGs across country planning and budgetary frameworks, including at the local level; and
- a growing focus on policy coherence through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to SDG implementation.

Many speakers provided specific examples of country progress for the SDGs under review. BULGARIA, SERBIA and MOLDOVA highlighted their efforts to improve gender equality, citing their improved rankings on the Global Gender Gap Index. THE LAO PEOPLES’ DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC said the most urgent task is to translate FfD4 into tangible results, noting their upcoming graduation from LDC status.

As a landlocked mountainous country, KYRGYZSTAN mentioned its facilitation of preparations towards the Bishkek+25 Global Mountain Forum in 2027. Stressing that the convergence of conflict and other crises is manifested in cities and other settlements, AZERBAIJAN underscored the role of urban planning as a key engine for national development.

INDIA offered their SDG approach of “scale, speed and stability” as a viable model for other countries. KAZAKHSTAN said 80% of their public spending goes to implementation of Agenda 2030.

GHANA said their 2025 VNR is aligned with the 2023 SDG Summit and the 2024 Pact for the Future, calling for bold reforms on the international finance architecture, follow-up to the Summit for the Future, and genuine partnerships that close the digital gap.

BANGLADESH highlighted their contribution to global norm setting, citing Muhammad Yunus’ “Three Zeros” vision of zero poverty, zero unemployment, and zero net carbon emissions, as well as the country’s contribution to peacekeeping around the world. BAHRAIN flagged their success in shifting from an oil-based to a diversified economy, reporting that non-oil sectors such as financial services and health sector innovations currently account for 86% of the country’s economy.

Dominican Republic, for the JUSTICE ACTION COALITION, urged reform of justice systems, particularly to correct systematic exclusion of women, youth, and children. They emphasized the costs of not investing in equal access to justice for all, given that injustice drives inequality, unrest, and erosion of trust and social cohesion.

GUATEMALA noted their ongoing democratic transition and investment in the human economy to address the historically informal labor market and improve healthcare as a right.

CROATIA said their recovery from conflict in the 1990s has built their resilience and their dedication to reform peace and security and sustainable development.

SWITZERLAND mentioned the annual UN Forum of Mayors meeting in Geneva to discuss SDG implementation.

Many countries underlined the link between peace, security, and sustainable development. PALESTINE stressed that in Gaza, “an entire population is left behind,” describing the killing of tens of thousands as an assault on not only people but the UN Charter, international law and the principles of international development. They urged delegates not to resign themselves “to the status quo of stagnation,” but to choose solidarity and multilateralism as the

only pathway to fulfil our collective pledge of leaving no country and no one behind.

Noting the number of children threatened by conflict is unprecedented, Bulgaria for the GROUP OF FRIENDS OF CHILDREN AND THE SDGs, called for protecting children's rights and investing in children, especially on health care, food security and education. MALI and CHAD highlighted ongoing efforts to rebuild their states after long periods of conflict.

MOLDOVA highlighted their support for thousands of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine. ZIMBABWE, Palau, for AOSIS, and China, for the GROUP OF FRIENDS OF THE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE, called for the immediate and unconditional removal of unilateral coercive measures, describing them as a major hindrance to SDG progress.

Colombia, for PATHFINDERS FOR PEACE, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES, underscored a 14-year life expectancy gap between the most and least violent countries. MEXICO said the 2015 commitment to the 2030 Agenda as the roadmap for the rights and wellbeing of all peoples reflects the original UN commitment to "remove the scourge of war."

LATVIA said Russian aggression against Ukraine hinders progress on all SDGs.

On efforts to tackle entrenched and emerging challenges, the ALLIANCE OF COUNTRIES ON THE FIGHT AGAINST TUBERCULOSIS advocated against treating tuberculosis as a disease of the past, highlighting millions of new infections in recent years. The UK noted it co-hosts, with South Africa, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, calling for private sector participation, improving domestic taxation, and tackling illicit finance.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC noted their 33 coastal initiatives, including action to address the impact of sargassum.

SAUDI ARABIA urged a focused approach to SDG implementation that channels resources where they are most needed, focuses on scalable solutions, and relies on data and evidence.

The Philippines, for ASEAN, noted synergies between the 2030 Agenda and the [ASEAN Community Vision 2045](#).

AOSIS noted that despite a high per capita GDP, SIDS and other climate-affected countries are facing unsustainable debt burdens.

EGYPT welcomed progress on universal healthcare, eradicating poverty, empowering women, and climate leadership in Africa. AUSTRIA said their VNRs include youth participation, as it is their future, and SDGs must be owned at all levels.

SLOVENIA noted "little change" since the 1992 Earth Summit other than increasing challenges, and called for renewed global commitment to equitable and sustainable development.

SOUTH AFRICA called for a paradigm shift for the SDGs and reform of the UN system, including the Security Council, calling for concrete outcomes for advancing global peace.

Exercising their right of reply, ISRAEL objected to "libelous accusations by Palestine."

RUSSIA opposed LATVIA's statement on the war in Ukraine as "unfounded accusations."

UKRAINE stated that the invasion by the Russian Federation was in contravention of the UN Charter.

### **Voluntary National Reviews**

**THAILAND:** Maris Sangiampongsa, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Thailand, and other speakers, presented Thailand's third VNR, highlighting their locally-driven and multi-stakeholder approach, and Thailand's efforts on SDG data capacity. They noted key challenges regarding better utilization of technology, financing, and SDGs localization, as well as strong advancements on SDGs 12 (sustainable consumption and production), 5 (gender equality), and 10 (reduced inequality), while acknowledging the need to intensify efforts on SDGs 15 (life on land), 8 (decent work and economic growth), and 17 (partnerships for the goals). They shared lessons learned on knowledge decentralization, connecting academia with other actors, highlighting the need for meaningful participation of civil society.

**Discussion:** Delegates from GERMANY, LGBTQI, BULGARIA, and JAPAN posed questions. Speakers noted Thailand's efforts on localizing SDGs and multi-stakeholder collaboration, mentioning the creation of 15 pilot Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) at the provincial level and a national framework for VLRs. They emphasized the role of civil society as a key development partner, the importance of data-driven evaluation and collection systems, and the crucial role of technology in improving the quality and efficiency of data collection. They highlighted the importance of community-led research and partnerships with all stakeholders in policy-making processes.

**EL SALVADOR:** Francisco Martínez, Technical Coordination Specialist, National Council for Sustainable Development, El Salvador, presented his country's third VNR, noting progress in security, economic growth, social inclusion, and institutional strengthening. He said that 65% of the 22 prioritized targets showed positive progress, while 23% of the indicators need faster advancement, and others lack data. He noted homicide rates have dropped to their lowest recorded level, and stressed the adoption of innovative laws that provide fiscal incentives to high-tech sectors while creating quality jobs. He highlighted El Salvador's commitment to strengthening SDG monitoring, public governance, and multisectoral participation.

**Discussion:** Martínez answered questions from SURINAME, INDONESIA, and the WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP. Questioned about human rights violations in his country, he noted El Salvador's civil war history, stressing advances in security and wellbeing. While acknowledging "it is not perfect," he underscored the situation is improving, allowing people to live better. He stressed El Salvador's commitment to strengthening institutional mechanisms and "breaking chains that hinder development," noting the importance of the SDGs as tools for monitoring and achieving peace.

**MALTA:** Francine Pace Caruana, Director for Sustainable Development, Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Public Cleanliness, Malta, introduced Malta's second VNR, outlining her country's Sustainable Development Vision and Strategy for 2050 focusing on a climate-neutral economy, sustainable urban development and cultural heritage, health and well-being, digital transformation, and social fairness. She shared on progress in achieving SDG targets, including: poverty decline; healthcare gains; a drop in the unemployment rate; improvements in gender equality and LGBTQI rights; advancements in marine conservation; and strengthened data collection to track progress and inform policy. She outlined Malta's priorities for accelerating the SDGs, which include strengthening statistical capacities,

fostering stakeholder engagement, deepening collaboration, and promoting inclusive, digital transformation.

**Discussion:** Caruana answered questions from ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, IRELAND, the OLDER PERSONS STAKEHOLDER GROUP, THE PHILIPPINES, and PALESTINE. On measures to address the implementation gaps identified in the VNR, she emphasized the need to continue working on the existing framework, ensuring transparency and accountability, and building the capacity of public administration bodies. She underscored the adoption of a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, and shared measures taken, including mapping stakeholders and gathering CSO insights through questionnaires for the VNRs. Caruana further highlighted initiatives on fostering coherence and intercultural inclusion, enhancing integration through language, and combating racism. She reinforced Malta's commitment to transparency and accountability, and strengthening engagement with CSOs, especially youth.

**CZECHIA:** Petr Kulhanek, Minister of Regional Development, Czechia, presented the country's second VNR, reporting on progress in decarbonization, digital transformation, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and active participation of seniors, noting challenges regarding inclusion of socially marginalized groups. He explained that his country pursues a twin green and digital transition, while prioritizing climate change adaptation. Noting that Czechia hosts many Ukrainian refugees, he emphasized efforts to include Ukrainian students and international engagement to maintain peace, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

**Discussion:** Responding to questions from ISREAL, COMMUNITIES DISCRIMINATED ON WORK AND DESCENT, ETHIOPIA, and INDIA, Kulhanek outlined his country's SDG governance structure with four ministries responsible for SDG implementation and reporting. He underscored efforts to include high-school students in VNR development, adding that students identified SDG 16 (peace justice and strong institutions) as their highest priority. On continued exclusion of Roma, he described measures to address segregation in schools and an updated definition of ethnicity, noting this is a high priority issue.

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA:** Ano Pala, National Planning Minister, Papua New Guinea, presented the country's second VNR, outlining progress in health, education, poverty reduction, and infrastructure investment, but acknowledged that much remains to be done, especially regarding gender equality in rural areas and prevention of gender-based violence. Noting a national ambition to double the size of the economy while generating broad and inclusive benefits to leave no one behind, he encouraged development partners to deepen partnerships that also strengthen national leadership in development planning. He highlighted plans to invest in data collection and infrastructure for multi-level monitoring and facilitating future development cooperation.

**Discussion:** Responding to questions from AUSTRALIA, INDIA, INDONESIA, and EDUCATION AND ACADEMIA STAKEHOLDER GROUP, Pala outlined efforts to leverage information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve public service delivery and expand data collection, acknowledging significant gaps in ICT infrastructure. Regarding limited progress on SDG 5 (gender equality), he described challenges in collecting gender-disaggregated data in a culturally diverse context, noting

that legal and policy frameworks to improve gender equality have been put into place.

**ISRAEL:** Rami Rozen, Director General, Ministry of Environmental Protection, Israel, presented Israel's second VNR, focusing on case studies regarding universal and highly digitalized health care; protecting children and youth from cyberbullying; technologies for water desalination and efforts in water management; municipal green building and climate change adaptation; marine ecosystem protection; and international partnerships to develop and share technological developments. Noting "deep challenges" arising from the October 2023 attacks and the recent bombings by Iran, he said Israel remains committed to the SDGs for a more inclusive and just world.

**Discussion:** Noting that Israel's VNR evades key issues of ecocide in Gaza and their use of hunger as a weapon, a MAJOR GROUP representative said the VNR tells two tales: one of prosperity and sustainable development for Israeli settlers, and one of projected population decline for Arab citizens. PALESTINE said Israel's VNR is whitewashing the impacts of their war on Gaza regarding the environment, agriculture and food security, and water availability, noting that there can be "no SDG progress and no future under Israeli occupation."

Saying the HLPF should not be politicized, Rozen and other speakers responded to questions from CZECHIA, INDIA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, JAPAN, NAURU and KENYA, explaining, among other issues: municipalities' receipt of direct funding to develop climate adaptation plans and support for implementation based on cost benefit analysis and prioritization; efforts to protect 30% of marine and terrestrial ecosystems by 2030; and plans to triple desalinated water production to protect natural river flows and aquatic ecosystems.

### *In The Corridors*

As the Ministerial segment of the HLPF kicked off, calls for the UN to be "less abstract" and more people-centered continued to reverberate in the many side events and unofficial discussions. These found resonance during the opening of the Ministerial segment in the morning when ECOSOC President, Bob Rae, emphasized the necessity to "demonstrate the UN's usefulness through tangible results."

Several observers were less positive about the UN80 process: "Good but not enough," commented one, who called for the ongoing multilateral reform process to better reflect global geopolitical dynamics and ensure more representation from developing countries.

Another common thread across informal and formal speeches was a sense of frustration with the seeming weakness of multilateral institutions in the face of the Palestinian crisis and other conflict hotspots. It led several to speculate that this might trigger some countries to disengage with the UN80 process altogether and towards exploring links with other fora such as the G20 and BRICS.

By contrast, the Voluntary National Reviews have attracted almost universal praise, although some observers, as well as respondents in the room, did raise concerns about the transparency of the reviews, citing, among other issues, corruption, and the reliability of the data shared. Similar to the General Debate, the afternoon VNR set did not escape geopolitical tensions. Several observers have noted that this lingering tension is likely to continue to impact on much-needed joint action to advance the SDGs.