

SDG Summit Highlights: 19 September 2023

On the second and last day of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Summit, Heads of State and Government and other dignitaries continued discussing how to reinvigorate and accelerate action on the 2030 Agenda. They delved deeper into reflections on finance for SDG implementation, touching upon issues such as tax reforms and concessional finance.

Leaders' Dialogue 5 "Unity and Solidarity: Strengthening the multilateral system for enhanced support, cooperation, follow-up and review"

Co-Moderator Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, President of MOZAMBIQUE, underscored the urgent need to reinvigorate multilateralism and rebuild mutual trust. He said the UN's relevance depends on its capacity to respond to global challenges, including by fostering the provision of finance and technology to implement the SDGs.

Co-Moderator Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Prime Minister of ICELAND, lamented the high number of conflicts around the world, especially the war of aggression in Ukraine, and the growing backlash against gender equality and human rights. She pointed to national initiatives in Iceland including: commitment to doubling contributions to the Green Climate Fund; integrating the principles of wellbeing economy to budget planning; and minimizing the offshoring of lifestyle impacts to other countries.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, UKRAINE, outlined his country's role as a guarantor of global food security amid the ongoing war. He underscored that the world has all the necessary resources to push for sustainable development and can "do so much more" by acting, not talking. He welcomed support for his country and emphasized the importance of solidarity.

President Klaus Iohannis, ROMANIA, emphasized the need to develop policies on the basis of science and reliable data. He called for pooling resources and accelerated global and regional cooperation to implement the 2030 Agenda.

President Nikos Christodoulides, CYPRUS, emphasized the need to tackle inequality and rebuild confidence in the multilateral system and common ownership of the 2030 Agenda.

President Faustin-Archange Touadéra, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, underscored the importance of means of implementation to support sustainable development efforts, and enhanced cooperation between governments, local authorities, and science.

HSH Prince Albert II, MONACO, called hunger a "scourge and an aberration of our times" and underscored Monaco's long-term commitment to counter malnutrition and transform food systems. He further recommended focusing efforts on least developed

and vulnerable countries, and described youth as the "target and compass" for all action.

Prime Minister Xavier Espot Zamora, ANDORRA, highlighted recent achievements in: e-mobility and zero-energy buildings; providing free public transport; protecting youth and children's rights; disability inclusion; and combating gender discrimination.

Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, NORWAY, called for a reform of the international financial architecture and fast-tracking the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and announced that Norway will: support combating excessive debt; maintain its high levels of official development assistance (ODA); double climate-related funding by 2026; and continue to work on transforming food systems. He emphasized the need to rebuild trust among the international community and improve tax policies.

President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, MAURITANIA, opined that multilateralism remains the key to sustainable development but needs "a fresh impetus" in terms of effectiveness, solidarity, and inclusion.

President Emomali Rahmon, TAJIKISTAN, supported: rehauling the international financial architecture; limiting debt burdens; increasing ODA; and strengthening trade and investment.

Zheng Han, Vice President, CHINA, drew attention to the Global Development Initiative launched by China in 2021. He suggested: keeping development at the center of the global agenda; building an open-world economy and a favorable external environment for developing countries; seizing opportunities arising from science and technology; and reinvigorating climate finance.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, JAPAN, reminded delegates that the principles of human dignity and solidarity should underpin the implementation of the SDGs. He called for: closing the gap in development finance; reforming multilateral development banks (MDBs); and collaborating with private actors.

Ivica Dačić, Minister for Foreign Affairs, SERBIA, delineated his country's efforts in: youth and education policy; investments in science and innovation as engines of economic growth and social progress; and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and adapting to climate change.

Antony Blinken, Secretary of State, UNITED STATES, encouraged a fundamental reshaping of MDBs and tackling debt. He emphasized investment in high quality infrastructure and ensuring food security in low- and middle-income countries, and called on "all major economies to step up efforts to help countries tackle debt."

Bootii Nauan, Minister of Tourism, Commerce, Industry, and Cooperatives, KIRIBATI, highlighted the need for strengthening critical telecommunication infrastructure and digital platforms to improve peoples' lives.

Tambo Gina, Minister of Economic Planning and Development, ESWATINI, underscored as priorities: job creation

(SDG 8); and support for youth, entrepreneurship, and social security.

Ricard Pierre, Minister of Planning and External Cooperation, HAITI, welcomed the adoption of the Political Declaration and called on all world leaders to work towards a large-scale programme for the achievement of the SDGs, focusing on reform of the international financial architecture.

Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, Vice President, EQUATORIAL GUINEA, highlighted his country's commitment to end extreme poverty, hunger, AIDS, and malaria, and to promote quality education and medical access for all.

Kaba Nialé, Minister of Planning and Development, CÔTE D'IVOIRE, called for a thorough reform of the international financial architecture, particularly the Bretton Woods institutions, to speed up achievement of the SDGs and climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister for Foreign Affairs, AZERBAIJAN, said his country is committed to supporting Africa and SIDS in their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Denis Moncada Colindres, Minister for Foreign Affairs, NICARAGUA, urged focusing on: the most vulnerable; strengthening global governance in the context of a new global order and multipolar world; and a development model for eradicating poverty and inequality while respecting the principle of non-interference.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC, discussed regional-level collaborations for the SDGs, including on municipal climate action and gender equality in the context of the care system.

Ajay Jha Kumar, Director, CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS SOCIETY, said the 2030 Agenda is off track because it doesn't fully address systemic barriers, including barriers for low-income countries to engage in partnerships.

Leaders' Dialogue 6 "Mobilizing finance and investments and the means of implementation for SDG achievement"

Co-Moderator Macky Sall, President of SENEGAL, opened the final leaders' dialogue by highlighting the urgency of lowering the cost of debt. He underscored that Africa is underfinanced and faces borrowing costs up to eight times higher than those of developed countries. He stressed that ODA alone is insufficient to fill the financing gap, and welcomed the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's efforts to set a global minimum tax in order to fight harmful tax avoidance and evasion.

Co-Moderator Ulf Kristersson, Prime Minister of SWEDEN, noted the world is in a very different place than when the 2030 Agenda was adopted, and the pace of poverty reduction has slowed. He emphasized accelerated climate action, scaling up innovations and technical solutions, and harnessing the potential of digitalization.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe, SRI LANKA, reminded delegates that many countries, including his own, are at the verge of bankruptcy as a result of recent crises. He underscored that there is little to no fiscal space to prioritize spending on the SDGs.

President Hage Geingob, NAMIBIA, lamented that his country is unfairly classified as middle-income, preventing it from accessing many grants and concessional loans and therefore "getting punished for doing well." He called for a higher risk appetite from international financial institutions (IFIs).

President Guillermo Lasso Mendoza, ECUADOR, outlined national progress in fighting infant malnutrition and protecting nature, and reported having successfully completed the greatest debt-for-nature swap in history.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, THAILAND, called for addressing the financing gap plaguing the SDGs by seeking out innovative sources of finance such as national sustainability bonds. He also described Thailand's plans to achieve zero poverty by 2027, promote and protect human rights by expanding universal health care, and foster cooperation on climate change.

Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, MAURITIUS, welcomed the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust created by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to offer financing regardless of income status. He called for creating impact investment facilities funded by Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) reallocated from other IMF members, and broadening the eligibility criteria for concessional finance to include island states.

Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, PAKISTAN, regretted the rise of poverty, food insecurity, and debt, exacerbated by a "morally bankrupt" financial system. He commended the initiative for an SDG stimulus plan which could generate USD 500 billion for countries facing liquidity challenges, and supported early recapitalization of MDBs, debt-for-nature swaps, and the repurposing of USD 400 billion of unused SDRs by the IMF to support SDG and climate action.

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani, IRAQ, reiterated his country's commitment to the SDGs despite complex challenges, noting the impacts of drought and plans to develop water infrastructure and irrigation as a priority (SDG 6).

President Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO, supported integrated funding frameworks and international funding to support the SDGs.

President Luis Alberto Arce Catacora, BOLIVIA, urged changing course to end capitalism and align policies with Mother Earth. He called for supporting countries in resisting "economic storms" and making critical investments, highlighting national investments in lithium mining to support a just transition to e-mobility.

Prime Minister Alexander de Croo, BELGIUM, lamented that countries are forced to choose between reducing poverty and fostering a green transition. He highlighted Belgium's support for: the repurposing of SDRs to a special IMF Resilience and Sustainability Trust, debt-for-nature swaps, private sector partnerships, and the EU's Global Green Bond Initiative.

Paul Richard Gallagher, HOLY SEE, called for a new model of development putting human dignity at its center.

Naadir Hassan, Minister of Finance, Economic Planning, and Trade, SEYCHELLES, called on IFIs, governments, and philanthropies to support the pursuit of SDGs. Although grants "are very welcome," he said small islands are asking for the opportunity to access concessional finance.

Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden, UNITED KINGDOM, recommitted the UK to both the SDGs and to reforming the international financial system so that will help deliver them. He announced: reforms to bring USD 200 billion in additional finance to MDBs over the next ten years; a UK guarantee to unlock USD 1 billion in education financing; and a UK guarantee to unlock USD 1.8 billion in climate financing for Asia-Pacific countries. He expressed support for a "bigger and better World Bank" to increase the voice and representation of the poorest and most vulnerable countries, and for a debt repayment pause during climate disasters.

Aboubakar Nacanabo, Minister of Economy, Finance, and Forecasting, BURKINA FASO, said his country's efforts to mobilize domestic resources have not yielded the needed amount. The sectors facing the largest SDG financing gap are education, infrastructure, health, and social protection, he added.

Faisal Alibrahim, Minister of Economy and Planning, SAUDI ARABIA, reported on development support provided by his country, especially for poverty alleviation. He said the global financial system should be reformed to promote policies for faster economic growth in developing countries, and highlighted the role of sustainability disclosure frameworks in informing investors and the power of private finance.

Keisal Peters, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES, called for a “profound transformation of the sustainability development model” to mobilize more internal and external resources for small island developing states (SIDS). She welcomed the growing momentum to reform the international financial architecture to better align it with climate action, the SDGs, and developing countries’ needs and priorities. Noting SIDS’ “legacies of underdevelopment,” she called for reparatory justice in the framework of the SDGs with a special caveat for reparation from European countries.

Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, UN CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT, noted developing countries’ high spending on debt services forces them to make “impossible choices” and called for a global financial safety net for systemic shocks.

Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director, IMF, underscored the need to increase the tax-to-GDP ratio to expand fiscal space and urged “better-off countries” to pass off their SDRs to those in greater need.

Demeke Mekonnen Hassen, Minister for Foreign Affairs, ETHIOPIA, lamented that the global economic downturn forces many developing countries to focus on debt management instead of development or climate action. He called for addressing illicit financial flows through international tax cooperation and stepping up funding for infrastructure.

Beena Johnson, General Secretary, NATIONAL CAMPAIGN ON DALIT HUMAN RIGHTS, urged attention for communities suffering from discrimination on the basis of their work or descent, and called for protecting women’s and transgender people’s rights. She said the “debt trap ravaging many developing countries is a crime.”

Closing segment

Looking back on discussions held during the SDG Summit, Li Junhua, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, noted convergence on the following points:

- building resilience to address the existential threat of climate change;
- expanding social protection to leave no one behind;
- localizing SDGs in conflict-afflicted and fragile states;
- pursuing transformative action through science, technology, and innovation;
- leveraging digitalization to speed up progress on the SDGs;
- strengthening integrated policies and mainstreaming SDG implementation at the national level;
- renewing multilateralism as an imperative for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
- mobilizing finance and investment, including through the SDG stimulus, climate finance, debt relief, and a reform of the international finance architecture; and
- going beyond GDP, including through considering the multidimensional vulnerability index.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, CANADA, Co-Chair of the Sustainable Development Goals Advocates group, underscored that “stability benefits us all” in a world of looming uncertainty, climate change impacts, and conflicts. He emphasized the critical relevance of ending poverty and hunger, and called the

[Global Sustainable Development Report 2023](#) “sobering” and “alarming.” He reminded delegates that the SDGs are not a “luxury” but the “building blocks of success in each and every country and community.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres called upon leaders to make the most of the discussions held at the Summit by focusing on seven key areas:

- mobilizing at least USD 500 billion for sustainable development per year, ideally with the help of a leaders’ group to outline concrete steps to get funding flowing in 2024;
- shifting the focus of Voluntary National Reviews towards accountability for commitments made at the Summit;
- strengthening support for food security, energy, digitalization, education, social protection and decent jobs, and biodiversity;
- bringing to life the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection;
- fulfilling the goal of 0.7% of GNI for ODA in 2024;
- using the next IMF meeting to accelerate progress, including through recapitalization, rechanneling of SDRs, restructuring debt on longer and more affordable terms, and developing concrete proposals for a reform of the global finance architecture in time for the Summit of the Future in 2024; and
- arriving at the UNFCCC’s COP 28 with concrete plans to support developing countries achieve a just transition to renewable energy and to operationalize the loss and damage fund.

“This development to-do list is not just homework, it is hope work” he underscored, calling for leadership and for countries to take these discussions to heart when preparing their national budgets for 2024.

Dennis Francis, President of the UN General Assembly, said the Summit had clarified current challenges and underscored the need for timely cooperation and the mobilization of financial resources on reasonable terms. “The people do not want our excuses, they want decisive action and progress,” he stressed, closing the meeting at 6:34pm.

In the Corridors

If you take applause as an indicator of momentum, then the second and last day of the 2023 SDG Summit showed two things: a thirst for signs of global solidarity, and an appetite for reforming the international finance architecture.

Ukrainian President Zelensky made an appearance in his well-known olive outfit to highlight his country’s resolve in supporting global food security by keeping grain exports moving to countries in Africa and beyond, all the while being engaged in military action to defend its borders. He challenged leaders to achieve similarly remarkable results, noting the world has all the necessary resources to translate the SDGs into reality. “Hard to argue with that,” conceded an inspired delegate, who hoped dignitaries will take Zelensky’s plea to heart and “do so much more” by “acting, not talking.”

Louder even was the applause for IMF Managing Director Georgieva. She delivered a passionate speech, directly calling upon “the better-off countries” in the room to pass on their Special Drawing Rights “so that the money can work.” The Summit might not have yielded a long list of commitments, noted a seasoned observer, but it seems like “a game changer” to hear multiple developed countries eager to reform multilateral development banks and make them more responsive to developing countries’ needs.

Rethinking the powerful system set in place at Bretton Woods could be a key step towards a new, more resilient, and fairer world, agreed another hopeful delegate on his way out.



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