

High-level Political Forum Brings Poverty and Sustainability Issues Together at Inaugural Session

New York, 26 September—The initial session of the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development “augurs well for the future,” according to General Assembly President John Ashe, in his summation of the proceedings at the close of the meeting, held on 24 September.

“Today, we confirmed that we are ready to implement the vision of Rio+20, putting poverty eradication and sustainable development at the core of the post-2015 development agenda,” the President said. “We committed to a Forum that ensures sustainability is factored into global and national decision-making and development activities. Leaders from around the world agreed to put serious energy and resources toward making our vision for this Forum a reality.”

Presidents and prime ministers, along with other high-ranking officials, participated in the Forum’s first session, representing a follow-up of the commitment made at Rio+20 to continue to press for action on sustainable development at the highest levels.

At Rio+20 – the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Brazil in June 2012 -- in its outcome document “The Future We Want,” Member States called for the creation of the High-level Political Forum to ensure that sustainable development tops the agenda of the highest levels of government and is embraced by all actors.

“I am pleased to see such high-level representation here today,” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said. “Your forum is a key platform for examining today’s challenges in a holistic and integrated manner.”

“This is a new forum, but we are not starting anew,” he added. “We have more than 20 years of work on sustainable development behind us. The Forum can build on what has been learned through its parent bodies, in particular the Commission on Sustainable Development. At the same time, it will take us in new directions, guide the UN system and hold it accountable. By establishing the forum, Rio+20 imagined new ways of pursuing our common agenda. We must be bold as we lay the ground for the Forum’s next sessions. Let us make the best use of its collected expertise, wisdom and influence. Let us make a real difference in the well-being of current and future generations.”

“We’re off to a good start,” said UN Under-Secretary-General Wu Hongbo. He said that the forum must be at the forefront of analysis and policy thinking on sustainable development. “Rio+20 wisely calls on the HLPF to strengthen the science-policy interface; a global sustainable development report will help serve this important purpose.”



Brazilian President Dilma Roussef, who presided over the Forum as the President of Rio+20, said that States had taken a decisive step towards consolidating the Rio sustainable development agenda, having agreed that eradicating poverty was the biggest global challenge. "The task now is to realize their commitments. The Forum should provide a platform for leadership, recommendations and monitoring to ensure the integration of sustainable development's economic, social and environmental pillars." She added, "We must live up to the expectations of our peoples."

"Rio+20 created momentum," World Bank President Jim Yong Kim told the Forum. "We have the opportunity to take it to the next level." But he warned that environmental degradation could reverse the gains made over the last 20 years that have lifted 660 million people out of poverty. He said that environmental degradation was already costing some countries eight per cent of their gross domestic product, and that "green, inclusive growth was both necessary and affordable."

"We are here today for one reason and one reason only—" said Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, "—to agree on the actions we must take as a global community to support global sustainable development."

"We need 21st century policies for a 21st century global economy, which means thinking more creatively, more cohesively, and more collaboratively than in the past. Why? Because our planet faces a triple challenge: from economic instability, from environmental damage, and from insufficient equity. We cannot view these in isolation. Each feeds on and magnifies the other."

In his concluding remarks, General Assembly President Ashe said that the task ahead is "daunting and governments cannot do it alone," suggesting that development actors must join forces to find new ways to partner and combine resources and creative energies for the common good. "Genuine partnerships and mutual accountability are necessary as we move toward a post-2015 development agenda," he added. "The Forum can act as a catalyst for effective partnerships and a place for international action for development cooperation."

Ashe called the decision of Rio+20 to establish a high-level political forum "a powerful step in mainstreaming sustainable development in the post-2015 agenda." He said the forum will be "a home for the international community to address and coordinate the entirety of sustainable development issues. As guardian of sustainability, it can provide a platform for leaders to reflect on today's priorities, not in isolation but holistically."

The report of the Forum's first session will be followed up next year during the ECOSOC ministerial session. The Forum will next meet under the auspices of the General Assembly in four years. More information on the Forum can be found at <http://bit.ly/126ZanH>

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