

2018 High-Level Political Forum and HLS of ECOSOC
Draft Opening Remarks
by
H.E. Ms. Marie Chatardová
President of the Economic and Social Council

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United Nations Headquarters

Your Excellency Mr Miroslav Lajčák, President of the 72nd session of the General Assembly,
Your Excellency Ms Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General,
Ms Jayathma Wickramanayake, Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth,
Ms Michelle Yeoh, UNDP Goodwill Ambassador,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to speak to you today at the opening of the ministerial segment of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the high-level segment of ECOSOC.

We are meeting after one week of intense discussions on our theme – transforming to sustainable and resilient societies and on progress towards the SDGs. These first days of the HLPF showed that the 2030 Agenda has kept its power to inspire and guide actions. There is strong momentum to implement it at all levels. We all agreed that the time for action is now.

We discussed how we are progressing on the road to the SDGs.

There is progress, but generally not at a sufficient speed to realize the SDGs by 2030.

Thus, extreme poverty is a third of the 1990 value, but still 10.9 per cent of world population lives below poverty line and there are more undernourished people today than in 2016.

Seventy-one per cent of world population has access to clean water. But access to basic level of sanitation is declining and today 20 per cent of population does not have access to proper sanitation as compared to 12 per cent in 2000. Access to electricity has risen by ten per cent and now stands at 87 per cent globally, but still a billion people do not have access to electricity. And while the use of renewable energy is on the rise it has not yet reached 20 per cent of overall usage.

Disaster risk reduction strategies are also on the rise both nationally and locally, but still less than 100 countries have these strategies in place. While the cities present a lot of opportunities, the number of people living in slums is now on the rise since 2014 and close to 900 million people live in slums. 91 per cent of global population still breathes the air that is below the quality of WHO standards.

It is encouraging that 109 countries have national policies and initiatives relating to sustainable consumption and production, but domestic material consumption is growing globally, with consequences in terms of both resource pressures and associated environmental impacts. The rate of forest loss has been cut by 25 per cent. However, one fifth of the Earth's land surface covered by vegetation showed persistent and declining trends in productivity.

Despite improvement in domestic resource mobilization and enabling environment, we are way below the amounts we need to realize the SDGs. Debt service as a proportion of exports of goods and services has been on the rise for five consecutive years in the least developed countries. Official development assistance (ODA) continues to decline and so do the remittances. Broadband connectivity is still well below the level of the developed world in developing countries. The tariffs applied in preferential trade agreements dropped two per cent for least developed countries. However, the developing regions' share in world merchandise exports declined for two consecutive years, especially in least developed countries. Data and monitoring is on everybody's radar and 102 countries are implementing their national statistical plans, but very few developing countries have fully funded those plans.

Overall, it was clear from last week's debates that major disparities in achievements exist, both within and between countries. The LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS continue to lag behind on almost all targets. Middle-income countries, for their part, face their own challenges, with large groups of people being excluded from opportunities to better the lives of their families. Certain populations remain at high risk of being left behind and we need more strategies and disaggregate data to reach to the farthest behind first.

Against this backdrop, we however heard countless examples of how the Agenda is being translated into concrete policies and measures. It seems new ways of making policies are taking root, with many examples of more inclusive and evidence-based approaches. Science and technology hold the responses to many issues. We need to continuously harness new technologies to advance the SDGs, while alleviating their negative impacts and spreading access to "old technologies".

We heard success stories showing that integrated water resources management is a solution for many challenges.

We heard about policies directed at scaling-up investment in renewable energy production and lowering prices.

Policies and strategies are also being put in place to counter the major challenges we face in cities, ranging from boosting housing affordability, controlling urban sprawl, ensuring easy access to public spaces – to using science, technology and innovation and partnerships to close gaps.

Much is also being done to achieve improved resource efficiency, while improving people's well-being. Strategies for sustainable consumption and production are now in place in many countries.

Many of our participants shared good research and studies that can help protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. We know how to do this and we know that we need to do more.

We heard about the challenges and opportunities that exist today for strengthening global partnership and enhancing the means of implementation. It was underlined by many that policy coherence and an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels are essential.

These are all heartening messages. We will need to maintain the same level of energy in the twelve years ahead. The presence of so many Ministers here today shows that we are all engaged.

Our Heads of State and Heads of Government should also reaffirm their political commitment to the 2030 Agenda in 2019, when the HLPF will meet not only in July under the auspices of ECOSOC, but also in September under the auspices of the General Assembly.

We must engage the whole of society in our efforts.

Major groups and other stakeholders have helped us design the 2030 Agenda. We need to hear their voices here and at home. We should all empower them to carry the agenda in our own communities in our own countries.

We must also engage with the business sector. The Business Forum being held while we meet testifies of the commitment of CEOs of major companies.

We must also embrace leaders in the world of science, technology and innovation. I am very pleased to note that just last week the Secretary-General established a High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation and want to congratulate him on his foresight and leadership in this area.

A key concern running through the discussions last week was that we must make sure that we truly leave no one behind. I am very glad that we will hear from the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth in the next few minutes to expand on that issue.

As you know, during the three days of the ministerial segment of HLPF we will hear from 46 countries how they are implementing the 2030 Agenda nationally. We can learn a lot from their national voluntary reviews.

It is encouraging that, globally, two-thirds of all countries have undertaken a VNR, or will do so in the coming year..

A strong message from VNR reports is that the 2030 Agenda is not just for and about government initiatives and activities. Rather it also involves the business sector, civil society, academia, communities, and individuals – and, critically, youth.

Countries indicated that the Agenda enjoys widespread support at the highest levels of government. They highlighted steps taken to integrate the 2030 Agenda into national policy frameworks, as well as further follow-up actions.

They also underlined a number of challenges. One is the prioritization of the SDGs in the local context. Another is the strengthening of the institutional capacities of all the key stakeholders engaged in the process. Yet others are strengthening the role of evidence-based statistics and policy making, strengthening public institutions for mitigating climate change and disaster impact, enhancing productive capacity to develop economic resilience, strengthening the capacity of subnational governments, as well as achieving better institutional coordination, both vertical and horizontal.

I would also like to remind us that on Thursday, we have a high-level segment of ECOSOC. It will include a discussion on long-term projections and scenarios on the advancement of sustainable development and on leveraging new technologies for the SDGs.

Finally, I would like to underline that we here, all of us at the HLPF, can contribute to the 2030 Agenda.

With these thoughts, I want to wish to welcome you at the Forum and high-level segment of ECOSOC and extend to you my best wishes for successful deliberations. in the four days ahead.

Thank you.
