

# Ensuring that no one is left behind – How do we protect the poorest and most vulnerable from the crisis and empower them to realize the SDGs

## High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Statement by Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

6 July 2021

Excellencies,  
Distinguished participants,

The pandemic has set off a cascade of human rights disasters, of a scope and magnitude that we have rarely seen. It is reversing progress achieved in many countries and regions and **pushing millions more people even further behind.**

**Unequal access to vaccines** is killing people; generating new variants; and expanding the inequalities between and within countries. **A two-speed economic recovery is a recovery that is not sustainable and will ultimately cause new disasters.**

This is a moment for **transformative leadership** to build more equal and sustainable societies.

**Human rights-based approaches to development are powerful tools** that make us safer and more resilient. They place our emphasis on the people most at risk of discrimination. They are **the best way to reduce inequalities and resume our path towards realising the 2030 Agenda.**

Let me open up the tool-box:

- We need to vastly increase investment **in social spending**. The human rights to education, health, social protections and clean water are not ordinary services with a market-set price-tag. Access to affordable, quality services for all – including the poorest and furthest behind – is the **bedrock of more peaceful, equal and successful societies.**
- Even in a context of shrinking fiscal space, fighting corruption, reallocating resources and rethinking taxation can help to maximise resources for advancing **a human rights economy** – one that delivers access to health care, social protections, quality education, clean water, housing and other fundamental rights.

- **Human rights impact assessments** and **disaggregated data** are key to a clear vision of policymaking. **We cannot fix what we do not see.**
- **All policy making should be grounded in meaningful participation,** social dialogue, transparency and accountability. Every State needs the broadest possible civic space. **This is the core of SDG16,** which is essential to unlocking the 2030 Agenda.
- A human rights-based approach to recovery also requires greater **international cooperation** and solidarity to keep people afloat and rebuild fairer. Universal and equitable access to vaccines is likely to be the strongest determinant of whether and how every State – and humanity overall – can control the pandemic.
- And development financing and conditionalities should **support, not undermine** the capacity of every State to fund the human rights goals which keep people safe and well.

**The Secretary-General's Call for Action for Human Rights** summons all UN teams to place human rights at the heart of their support to States.

Our Office is committed to ensuring that this leads to better integrated, evidence-based **country analysis**; unified **advocacy**; and **field programming** that is better targeted, and more effective, because of its strong grounding in human rights.

Excellencies,

Inequalities stem from policy choices. They can – and should – be dismantled.

The High-Level Political Forum is uniquely charged with providing political guidance from the highest levels **to ensure we deliver on the 2030 Agenda** and shape a **sustainable and just recovery from COVID-19.**

This is challenging – but vital – work.

To be successful, we need to place human rights, including the right to development, at the core of our action.

Policies grounded on human rights that address inequalities and build social justice **will develop stronger economies.** They drive more inclusive political systems. They deepen trust. They help us reach those furthest behind. They build hope.

The Secretary-General's Call to Action asks the entire UN, and all States, to advance that vision of a new departure for our societies and economies, based on rights.

I look forward to intensifying our work together.