

14 July 2025

Deputy Secretary-General's remarks at the opening of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2025 [as prepared for delivery]

In 2015, the world made a landmark commitment to achieve sustainable development and ensure that no one is left behind.

The 2030 Agenda built on previous decades of development efforts and carried forward the vision and lessons of the Millennium Development Goals.

It framed the Sustainable Development Goals around a paradigm shift that integrates the three core dimensions of sustainable development -- economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability -- and underscored the vital role of effective governance and strong institutions.

It carried a promise to everyone, everywhere, to live in dignity, on a safe and healthy planet.

Today, a decade later, we meet again as the world grapples with conflicts and deepening geopolitical tensions.

The fabric of multilateralism is fading, and the SDGs seem out of reach. Hard-won development gains are at serious risk, as a multitude of challenges, exacerbated by the chronic shortfall in adequate financing.

Alarmingly, half of the world's poorest countries have yet to return to their pre-pandemic income levels.

Inequalities have amplified.

Trade tensions are escalating.

The climate crisis is worsening.

Democracy is under threat.

And the debt crisis continues to tighten its grip on the world's poorest countries.

The situation is truly sobering.

Yet, the latest data show that while progress on SDGs has been uneven and limited, there is reason for hope.

Social protection and health systems are expanding, especially in middle-income countries, where they are reaching more people.

More mothers are surviving childbirth, and more children are living beyond their fifth birthday.

Education access is broadening, creating new pathways for young people.

The number of girls who are in school and studying STEM subjects is higher than ever before.

Countries are investing in better data and technology, for policies to reach the furthest behind.

There are promised investments in digital connectivity and clean energy, to serve those in the most remote areas.

Meanwhile, the world has united behind an ambitious global agreement to confront deep-seated structural challenges and unlock faster, more inclusive progress.

The Pact for the Future, adopted last September, builds on existing reforms and commitments and charts a bold way forward to revive multilateralism and collective action, anchored in peace, solidarity and cooperation.

The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development renewed our commitment to deliver on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, take forward debt solutions, and tackle the international financial architecture.

The Ocean Conference in Nice generated important consensus on critical issues, from marine protected areas to plastic pollution, illegal fishing and maritime security.

The 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+30) and the 25th anniversary of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, reignited political drive for gender equality and women's empowerment.

And there are many more opportunities this year to push our agenda forward:

The Second Stocktake of the UN Food System Summit.

The Second World Summit on Social Development.

The Biennial Summit on Finance.

COP 30, and ahead of that, new, updated and economy-wide Nationally Determined Contributions to get our climate goals back on track.

Excellencies,

We must build on these achievements. Make the most of the momentum and drive action – particularly through this High-Level Political Forum.

We are under pressure because the truth is: expectations are high, trust is eroding and crises are deepening, as we strive to deliver on our promise of the 2030 Agenda.

This Forum is an important opportunity to reflect, exchange and course correct.

It is our space to amplify the momentum, share lessons and good practice, deepen partnerships, and reignite our collective ambition to fulfill the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Over the coming days, we must reflect honestly and constructively on progress. Particularly on:

SDG3 on health and wellbeing, SDG5 on gender equality and women's empowerment, SDG8 on decent work and economic growth, SDG14 on life below water, and SDG 17 on partnerships and means of implementation – this all with human rights at the centre of everything we do and hope to achieve.

And we must focus on the theme of this year's meeting: "Inclusive solutions, based in science- and evidence," and take heed of key findings of the Secretary-General's Report on the SDGs.

We need solutions that address persistent challenges.

That can be adapted and applied across diverse contexts.

And that improve the lives of billions of people who are left behind:

The 800 million people living in extreme poverty...

The 2.2 billion people without safe drinking water...

The 2.3 billion suffering food insecurity...

The 3.4 billion without safely managed sanitation...

And the countless women, Indigenous Peoples, smallholder farmers, and other marginalized groups unable to access formal health and protection systems.

Excellencies,

This Forum will also welcome the tenth set of voluntary national reviews, or VNRs. They present a temperature check of every country's journey.

Since 2016, a total of 190 countries have conducted close to 400 VNRs.

This voluntary national exercise has been almost universally adopted:

A heartening sign of commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs...

And evidence that the SDGs are now deeply woven into national plans, policies, and monitoring frameworks.

These reviews are powerful roadmaps to achieve the SDGs and mobilize all stakeholders.

Across regions, we have seen civil society's engagement deepen – driving progress nationally and locally.

VNRs have helped build knowledge and data and offered practical pathways to dismantle structural barriers that hold us back.

Over the past decade, they have inspired action through inclusive, scalable approaches, grounded in local realities.

I look forward to the 37 VNR presentations at this Forum,

And I encourage other countries to engage and foster a meaningful exchange of experiences.

Excellencies, Friends,

It is up to all of us to build on our successes, and make this Forum count.

We have come far. And have even further to go.

But we have much further to go if we are to honor the promise of the SDGs.

The pathway to 2030 is narrowing.

And the decisions we take now – where we invest, what we prioritize, and where we reform – will shape development trajectories for decades to come.

With five years to go, the Secretary-General's UN80 initiative marks a historic step to build on recent reforms and ensure that the United Nations remains a trusted, agile partner, ready to tackle today's challenges and tomorrow's uncertainties, and drive our collective push for the 2030 Agenda nationally, regionally and globally.

Thank you.