

Secretary-General of the United Nations

Remarks to Economic and Social Council

Operational Activities for Development Segment

Tuesday, 27 February 2018

[as delivered]

I have addressed the ECOSOC three times on the substance of the reform we are proposing for the UN development system. I thought that in the opening of this Operational Segment, it would probably make more sense to talk about the huge challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to our central objective in sustainable and inclusive development because it is that set of challenges we are facing that fully justifies the need to be bold in the reforms we are presenting.

And let's be clear, the situation is not a situation in which we can take for granted that Agenda 2030 will be fully implemented; there are a number of serious threats in the way global development is taking place, in the way the global economy is evolving, in the way technology is evolving. There are serious threats to Agenda 2030 and we need to be effectively reformed in order to be able to limit the impact of those threats and use, as much as possible, our potential of our capacities in support to Member States.

So, since ECOSOC is taking up the issue of Operational Activities for Development, allow me to step back to offer some perspectives on the economic and social picture we are operating under today.

Our world is facing a crisis of legitimacy, of confidence, of trust.

This crisis is not abstract – it is rooted in the legitimate fears, anxieties and even anger of people.

No one can doubt the many benefits of globalization – the integration of the world's economies, the expansion of trade, the stunning advances in technology.

More people have risen out of extreme poverty than ever before.

The global middle class is bigger than ever.

More people are living longer and healthier lives.

But too many are being left behind in the different Rust Belts of our world.

Women are still far less likely to participate in the labour market – and gender pay gaps remain a global concern.

Youth unemployment is at alarming levels. A big concern in relation to the welfare of young people, in relation to development, but also in relation to global security.

And inequalities are rampant – stretching the fabric of societies to the breaking point and undermining the social compact.

People are rightly questioning a world where a handful of men hold the same wealth as half of humanity (and they are men by the way, not a single woman).

Whole regions, countries and communities can find themselves marooned from waves of progress and left behind by growth.

Exclusion has a price: frustration, alienation, instability.

Life chances and contributions become severely limited. Vulnerability to economic and climate-related shocks grows. So, too, does the danger of forced migration and the temptation to fall prey to the siren songs of extremist ideologies.

At the same time, technology is transforming how we live and work – from bio- engineering to synthetic biology to artificial intelligence to data analytics and to many other aspects.

Yet, as much as technology is a vector of hope, it is also a source of fear.

The world is only beginning to address the dark side of innovation, from cybersecurity threats to the natural impacts of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on our societies and labour markets.

We already see the crippling impact of cyber-attacks on public infrastructure, and on electoral processes.

The risks of cyberwarfare between nations are increasing.

Artificial intelligence is changing the game and can boost development and transform lives in spectacular fashion.

But it may also have a dramatic impact on labour markets and, indeed, on global security and societies as a whole.

We also see how the web, in addition to being an incredible platform for free speech, is magnifying hate speech.

Innovation is far outstripping our ability to comprehend these implications and their unintended consequences.

We need to seize the potential of the Fourth Industrial Revolution while safeguarding against its dangers.

All of this compels us to do all we can to achieve inclusive and sustainable development -- a goal in its own right, but also our best form of prevention against all kind of risks.

After all, as long as we cling to an economic and social model that drives exclusion and environmental destruction, people die, opportunities are missed, the seeds of division and future conflicts are sown and the full force of climate change becomes ever more likely.

We need a global economy that works for all and creates opportunities for all.

To rebuild trust, we need to build a fair globalization.

The 2030 Agenda is our crucial contribution.

Poverty eradication is and remains our top priority. The 2030 Agenda is our roadmap and its goals and targets are tools to get there.

The Sustainable Development Goals make clear our ambition and our commitment.

To empower women. To include young people in meaningful ways. To reduce climate risk. To create decent jobs and mobilize clean investments for inclusive growth. To expand dignity and opportunity for all on a healthy planet.

Finance is pivotal. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda stresses the importance of upholding commitments to Official Development Assistance.

We will need it and much more. And so the Addis Agenda also calls for scaling up efforts and innovation in leveraging resources and financing for development.

We must also support countries in their efforts to mobilize domestic resources. But that must be accompanied by a stronger commitment by the international community to fight tax evasion, money laundering and illicit financial flows that are today a severe threat to many development countries aiming at reforms that are necessary to put them in sustainable growth.

The ambitious 2030 Agenda requires ambitious change in the way we operate.

That is why our proposals to reposition the UN development system are founded on creating a new generation of country teams to support countries, to reinforce national leadership and advance national ownership for sustainable development.

We are focused on building a system that is demand-driven, oriented around achieving results at scale, and accountable in providing support to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

With results for the people we serve as our ultimate measure, we are working to make our support to regional integration and to addressing transboundary opportunities and challenges more in tune with today's reality and country needs.

We have proposed a set of adjustments at the global level to make our operations on the ground more cohesive, effective and efficient.

I have also launched a series of work streams to strengthen the capacity of the Organization to harness the power of partnership.

We seek to bolster accountability of the UN development system both at the country level, and at the global level, through ECOSOC, empowered to hold us accountable and challenge us to do more, together.

And we propose a Funding Compact, to give the system the resources and the flexibility that it needs to deliver, in exchange for more transparency and accountability for results.

Over the next three days, as you consider these proposals, I encourage you to take inspiration from the ambition of the 2030 Agenda to help forge the future we want.

We have come a long way, together, since the far-reaching vision and guidance provided through the December 2016 resolution on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review.

We are now closer than ever to repositioning sustainable development at the heart of the organization and to having a development system that is an even stronger partner as we seek to deliver for people.

Together, let us make good on our shared promise to humanity – a future of prosperity, peace and dignity for all.

Thank you.

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