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TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES

Statement by H.E. Ms. Mona Juul, President of ECOSOC

*Briefing to the UN Human Rights Council
on the UN High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development and the 2030 Agenda*

13 September 2019

[Introduction]

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to address the Human Rights Council today. I'm here to brief the Council on the outcomes of this year's UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development.

This is the second time the President of ECOSOC has had the opportunity to participate in what we hope will become a tradition. This collaboration is a milestone in pursuing the 2030 Agenda and its human rights pillar in an integrated manner. And is an important opportunity for closer cooperation between Geneva and New York.

Strengthening the links between the Human Rights Council and the HLPF is more critical than ever. I am convinced that implementing, and reporting on human rights and the SDGs are a mutually reinforcing part of our efforts to further mainstream the human rights agenda. Resulting in real world impacts like: bringing the fulfillment of girls' and boys' right to education and health one step closer; ensuring that journalists around the world may report what they see; and that there will be decent work for all.

[HRC contribution to the 2019 HLPF]

The HLPF plays a pivotal role in overseeing follow-up of the 2030 Agenda at the global level. The 2019 HLPF reaffirmed the urgency to realise the human rights and dignity of **all people**. To promote social justice; combat discrimination, prejudice, xenophobia, and exclusion; tackle inequality in all its dimensions; and to ensure that benefits of development are equitably shared.



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UN Member States have agreed that SDGs must be implemented in accordance with international law, including international human rights law.

This year, once again, the HLPF benefitted from inputs provided by the Human Rights Council, as well as five treaty body submissions¹ and two submissions by OHCHR. These fed into the review of progress in a number of important SDGs. Furthermore, for the first time, human rights were included in national reporting.

The participation by the UN Special Rapporteurs and Independent Experts during the HLPF further underlined the indivisibility of human rights and the 2030 Agenda. Emphasising that virtually all activities and outcomes of the Human Rights Council may be understood as contributing to the principle of the 2030 Agenda to “leave no one behind”.

This year’s theme of “empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality” provided a more focused approach to this central principle. And was a focus of the first of two intersessional meetings for: “dialogue and cooperation on human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, convened by the Human Rights Council on 16 January 2019. The summary of which fed directly into the work of the 2019 session. We now look forward to the second intersessional meeting to be held in Geneva later this year.

Such intersessional meetings serve to provide a space for: Member States, regional human rights mechanisms, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations. To share: good practices, achievements, challenges and lessons learned in the promotion and protection of human rights and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

On this note, I would now like to provide you with an overview of some of the key messages and takeaways of the 2019 HLPF that are relevant to the work of the Human Rights Council.

[Briefing on the HLPF 2019]

The 2019 HLPF met in New York from 9 to 18 July under the auspices of ECOSOC. One hundred Ministers and Vice-Ministers participated, as well as heads of UN system and other organizations, and more than two-thousand representatives of Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) from all regions.

The Forum conducted an in-depth review of the following six SDGs: quality education (4); decent work and economic growth (8); reducing inequalities (10); climate action (13);



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peace, justice and strong institutions (16); and means of implementation and partnerships (17).

These reviews were mindful of the indivisible, integrated and interlinked nature of the SDGs and took into account cross-cutting and emerging issues.

Forty-seven countries presented Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), of which seven presented for the second time.

The 2019 HLPF also constituted the conclusion of the first four-year cycle of its review of the 2030 Agenda and all 17 SDGs.

An overarching message of the HLPF was that while progress has been achieved in many areas related to the SDGs and their targets, we still have a long way to go to reach the Goals, and little time left for action.

This message was echoed in the 2019 Secretary-General's report on *Progress Toward the Sustainable Development Goals*. It states in no uncertain terms that at the current pace, the world will not fulfil the SDGs in 2030.

[Human Rights and the HLPF]

Many of the discussions at the HLPF centered on issues related to equal opportunities and human rights. Participants frequently referred to high and increasing levels of inequality and vulnerability, not only as challenges in their own right, but also as major obstacles for achieving the SDGs.

Participants stressed that while inequality between countries may be decreasing, inequality within countries is on the rise. Hence, further work is needed to tackle the causes of inequality and meet the targets of SDG 10 and 16, including through combatting corruption, strengthening tax collection, ensuring access to justice, and respecting human rights.

A number of delegates noted the importance of improved governance, the rule of law, inclusive multilateralism and adherence to international human rights and labor standards, for example, in achieving SDG 8.

Multi-stakeholder and inclusive partnerships were identified as crucial for progress, with many participants noting the value of public-private and international collaboration.





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Inclusive institutional frameworks at the national level, including at the highest levels of Government, is necessary in order to properly address the inter-related and coherent nature of the SDGs. Several VNRs underlined that seeing the 2030 Agenda as an interconnected set of goals, had helped to stimulate ministries and agencies towards cross-cutting efforts.

Participants agreed that the transformative nature of the VNR process arose not only from implementing the SDGs, but also from policies that would trigger fairness and justice between the generations (known as intergenerational equity), particularly related to environmental assets. Which in itself a significant human rights issue.

The UN Secretary-General also outlined his “Inclusion Imperative”, which centers on growing investments and robust financial mechanisms; global climate action to reduce inequalities; recognizing the rights of migrants; and linking human rights, diplomacy and prevention to the concept of leaving no one behind.

I am pleased to also underline that Human Rights featured prominently in the VNRs. Many made reference to international human rights mechanisms and to specific international human rights treaties. With others highlighting efforts towards building more democratic societies through pursuing a human rights approach to issues of international terrorism, human trafficking, drug trafficking and corruption.

[Empowering people, ensuring inclusiveness and equality, and leaving no one behind as a human rights issue in the HLPF 2019]

As we were reminded last year by the research published by the Committee on Development Policy, some people are not only being *left* behind but are also being *pushed* behind by forces of globalization, technological advance, climate change, environmental degradation, austerity policies, and multiple forms of discrimination. The risks and burdens of which are inequitably borne by the poorest and most marginalized communities.

We should never forget that behind every piece of data and behind the SDG goals, targets, and indicators are human beings, with aspirations, hopes, and human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights.

The HRC intersessional meeting earlier this year highlighted the importance of inclusive and meaningful participation. This is crucial if we are to realize the 2030 Agenda for all.



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Civil society organizations, notably grass-roots organizations, and national human rights institutions play a crucial role in the delivery of the SDGs on the ground, where it matters most. The forthcoming review of the HLPF modalities will provide an opportunity to identify whether more meaningful space can be created for these important partners at the HLPF itself.

To reach the farthest behind, we need to work together. I therefore encourage the Human Rights Council to assist Member States in identifying individuals and communities who are most marginalized, vulnerable, and at risk for discrimination. And to support all efforts towards reaching these groups.

The intersessional meeting also emphasized that implementation of the SDGs should increasingly be integrated into the Universal Periodic Review process, and that human rights treaty bodies and special procedures should continue to take into account to the realization of the SDGs.

The meeting also recommended that likewise, Member States and other stakeholders should make better use of the Universal Periodic Review outcomes and reports of the treaty bodies and the special procedures to guide SDG implementation planning, follow-up and reporting, including in the preparation of VNRs.

[Preparing for the SDG Summit and the Decade for Action]

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

Less than two weeks from now, the SDG Summit and related meetings will convene at the start of the 74th General Assembly. World leaders will report on progress and share views on how to move ahead on Agenda 2030. Debates on climate change, health and financing for development all have specific relevance to human rights.

Later in the 74th General Assembly session, Governments will begin a process of reviewing the HLPF modalities, format and organizational aspects of the HLPF, building on lessons from its first four-year cycle.²

² Resolution 67/290 on the 'Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development' and Resolution 70/299 on 'Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level'.



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Building the linkages and synergies between the Human Rights Council and the HLPF is therefore more crucial than ever, if we are to ensure a more integrated and transformative approach to achieving the SDGs and realizing human rights. As we all recognise, human rights span economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights, including of course the right to development.

Michele Bachelet rightly stated at the HLPF this year, echoing the UN Deputy Secretary-General: Human rights are an intrinsic part of sustainable development, and sustainable development is a powerful vehicle for the realization of all human rights.

Excellencies,

I would like to express my gratitude for the work of both ECOSOC and the Human Rights Council this year, and to appreciate the efforts made by everyone involved to strengthen human rights across the 2030 Agenda.

It is my aim to continue this important work throughout my ECOSOC presidency. And have clearly integrated human rights in the priorities for my presidency. Which include: Financing for development, the implementation of UN Reform and ensuring that the rights of women and gender equality must remain a reform priority and a cross-cutting issue.

I look forward to engaging with you more deeply this coming year and do my part to work together to map out a decade for action that will ensure success on every level.

Thank you again for your tireless enthusiasm and support.



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