



**Statement by H.E. Bob Rae (Canada)**

**President of the Economic and Social Council**

Ministerial Opening of the 2025 High-Level Political Forum

21 July 2025

Your Excellency, Mr. President of the General Assembly,

Your Excellency, the Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Ladies and gentlemen,

As President of ECOSOC, I would like to welcome all to the ministerial segment of the 2025 High-Level Political Forum and high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council.

Ten years ago, we gathered here to adopt an ambitious Agenda for Sustainable Development. We adopted a universal set of Goals and targets – goals which represent the common sense of humanity.

Your presence here today—at senior levels and in such large numbers—is a powerful signal of our commitment to continue advancing this agenda. It reflects a common understanding and a collective will, that the Sustainable Development Goals are not optional ideals, but essential commitments that we have to make.

*Transition to French*

Excellences,

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Depuis la naissance de cette organisation nous avons bien compris à cause de nos expériences terribles dans notre histoire, que la paix ne



peut être soutenue sans la justice; que la sécurité ne peut être atteinte sans la dignité, et que la prospérité doit être partagée.

Aujourd'hui nous continuons de voir une disruption globale : les changements climatiques, les conflits, le désarroi économique et malheureusement la politique de nationalisme.

### *Transition to English*

As these interconnected factors challenge us, now is not the time to abandon our ideals. Now is actually the time to double down on solidarity and on multilateralism.

As President of ECOSOC, it has been hard to witness the extent to which diminishing national budgets around the world are making it harder to enhance the effectiveness of the UN in addressing global challenges.

But my message to you is: Yes, it makes it harder. It is more difficult. What many of our governments are doing will make our work tougher, but does it make it impossible? No, it does not.

We need to reaffirm the UN's relevance through results—by showing that multilateralism delivers real, tangible benefits for people at every level of society.

That includes working more closely with civil society, the private sector, youth, Indigenous peoples, and especially local governments—because that's where the SDGs are implemented.

Strengthening national ownership of the SDGs is essential. That means integrating them into national development plans, budgets, and



policies—not as an add-ons, but as the core of how Governments serve their people.

Excellencies,

This year's High-Level Political Forum contributes directly to the follow-up of the Summit of the Future and its Pact for the Future.

Our outcome document - the Ministerial Declaration – will reflect many of our common determinations and is also an opportunity to reinforce the role of ECOSOC and its connections with the General Assembly, and the Security Council.

And so, to answer this, we have to deal with what the UN Charter tells us. Many of you know that I often quote from the Charter, but allow me to quote from a section which is not often quoted, and that is related to the work we are supposed to be doing - Article 55 of Chapter IX, titled *International Economic and Social Cooperation*, reminds us that the UN was not created solely to prevent war, but also to address the root causes of conflict—poverty, inequality and exclusion.

And just as that was true then, it is true today. We have to recognize that the founding generation of the United Nations knew perfectly well the consequences of depression, the consequences of excessive nationalism, the consequences of tariffs that keep out trade and don't promote trade – these were all the consequences of that terrible dark valley of the 1920s and the 1930s. We must not return to that valley, and we must learn the lessons of the past.



Article 50 also reminded us that we need to promote:

- Higher standards of living – not just at home but everywhere.
- Full employment and conditions of economic and social progress – not just at home but everywhere.
- Solutions to international economic, social, health and related problems – not just at home but everywhere.
- And international cultural and social cooperation – so we can understand each other, and so above all we must learn to stop ignoring and hating each other – we must pull together as one expression of humanity.

And that also means we need a universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction. Freedom not just for some, but for all.

I would remind you that these are not just aspirations—they are obligations.

Finally, I want to express my thanks to all those who have been involved in the VNRs which are a constant aspect of the work of the UN.

I have seen how VNRs have evolved.

They now show greater inclusion of marginalized voices, stronger connections to local and regional action, and a growing culture of accountability.

They are an expression of shared learning, and I would encourage those of you who are not presenting VNRs this year to join in this experience.



Throughout my Presidency, I have also sought to make ECOSOC a more responsive and inclusive platform. We have worked hard with the World Bank, and the IMF, to bring them here and to visit them in Washington. We have worked hard to make people remember the issue of displacement – more than 140 million people now homeless. And yes, to embrace and to understand Artificial Intelligence – to make sure that this disruptor can become our friend.

As I reflect on this year, I am reminded of the words of Václav Havel, who said: “Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something is worth doing, no matter how it turns out.” We cannot stop hoping and we cannot stop trying.

As I conclude my Presidency of ECOSOC next week, I would like to take a moment to express my profound appreciation to Member States for their support, I also thank the Secretary General and the President of the General Assembly. It continues to be an honor to serve as your President and to be a champion for all of the Goals and all of the purposes of the United Nations.

Thank you.