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United Nations Economic and Social Council

**TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES**

**Statement by H.E. Ms. Inga Rhonda King, President of ECOSOC**

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

**14 September 2018**

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

It is my distinct honor to speak to you today, as the first President of the Economic and Social Council to address the Human Rights Council since its creation in 2006.

I welcome the opportunity created by Resolution 37/25 to brief the Council on the outcomes of this year's UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Our discussions here today will mark an important milestone in the effort to promote an integrated approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It will also enhance the linkages between New York and Geneva including amongst Member States, and enable the HLPF to build on the important work of the Human Rights Council, and vice versa.

I would first like to take a moment to acknowledge with great appreciation the work that has already been undertaken by the Human Rights Council to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, since their adoption by the UN General Assembly in 2015.



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The Human Rights Council responded to the invitation by the ECOSOC President in 2016, and again this year, to contribute input to the HLPF.

Its 2016 contribution rightly emphasizes 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 principle proved to be a central component of this year’s HLPF and was consistently recognized as a human rights issue by participants at the Forum. For the first time, the Forum included a session dedicated to the principle of leaving no one behind, to reaffirm the centrality of this principle to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This also highlighted the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination.

The 2018 HLPF also welcomed the important participation of a number of the Human Rights Council’s special procedure mandate holders.

I am also pleased to learn that, between September 2015 and April 2018, more than 40 per cent of the total number of all adopted texts of the Human Rights Council mentioned the 2030 Agenda or the SDGs.

It is a testimony to the mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda in the Human Rights agenda and the integrated approach to its implementation.

I would now like to turn to the HLPF session and provide you with an overview of some of the key messages and takeaways relevant to the work of the Human Rights Council.

The 2018 HLPF met in New York from 9 to 18 July under the auspices of ECOSOC. More than 125 Ministers, and Vice-Ministers participated. Forty six countries presented their Voluntary National Reviews. Over 2,200 non state actors registered.



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The HLPF focused on the theme of “transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”. The Forum also undertook an in-depth review of progress on a subset of six of the 17 SDGs related to water (SDG 6), energy (SDG 7), cities (SDG 11), sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12) and terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15), as well as SDG 17 on means of implementation, which is reviewed annually.

This review was mindful of the indivisible, integrated and interlinked nature of the SDGs and took into account cross-cutting, new and emerging issues.

An overarching message of the session 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 echoed the Secretary-General’s report on *Progress Toward the Sustainable Development Goals* **which stated that progress to ensure that no one is left behind has not been rapid enough to meet the targets of the 2030 Agenda**”.

Clearly, we need immediate and accelerated action by countries and stakeholders at all levels.

During the discussions at the HLPF: **“The issue of human rights was continually raised.** Participants reported that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by disasters and conflict, especially when living in poverty, and that many are still deprived of their basic rights. Many said that indigenous peoples are also disproportionately suffering from a lack of recognition of their rights in some countries, and meaningful consultations are often the exception rather than the rule. Some participants reminded the Forum that application of the principle of leaving no one behind could have an even greater positive effect when efforts are made to ensure that those at risk not only receive benefits, but also participate in and contribute to the process of sustainable development.”



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The concern for human rights also pervaded the thematic reviews. **The review of SDG 6 stressed the human right to water and sanitation.** It called for addressing inequalities in access to water and sanitation services.

Ms. Leilani Farha, UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, addressed the Forum during the review of SDG 11, noting that half of humanity—3.5 billion people—now lives in cities, but an estimated 1.6 billion people are inadequately housed and close to 900 million are living in informal settlements.

Many Forum participants agreed that **adequate housing as a human right must be at the heart of achieving the urban agenda and implementation of SDG 11**, and that all countries must develop and implement human rights-based housing strategies.

In the review of SDG 15, the Forum stressed the need to empower the custodians of terrestrial ecosystems, especially rural women; **respect the rights and knowledge of indigenous peoples**; and engage youth and other excluded or marginalized groups, in the context of policy planning and implementation, to increase the sustainable management of resources and ensure sustainable livelihoods.

Human Rights also featured prominently during the second week of the HLPF. **Most of the Voluntary National Reviews made reference to the international human rights mechanisms** and to specific international human rights treaties, [including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)].

Several VNRs also made specific mention of recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). **At least 13 VNRs explicitly highlighted how recommendations from the human rights mechanisms either have been, or will be, incorporated into domestic policies.**



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Working at the very principle of the 2030 Agenda, the discussions generally concluded that we are falling short of succeeding in leaving no one behind, especially in reaching the poorest of the poor.

**As the OHCHR's ASG, Andrew Gilmour, very eloquently put it during his intervention at this session, the problem is not just that some people are being *left* behind, but that some people are being *pushed* further behind** by forces of globalization, technological advance, climate change, environmental degradation, austerity policies, and many forms of discrimination – and the risks and burdens are inequitably borne by our poorest and most marginalized communities.

The commitment to leave no one behind demands that all member States focus on individual people and communities who are the most vulnerable and marginalized, and those who are discriminated against.

Groups frequently identified as vulnerable are those generally identified in the 2030 Agenda, notably women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons, and indigenous peoples. But some also included small holder farmers and people living in countries in conflict. The situation varies depending on the country or region.

The Forum reaffirmed the urgency to recognize the human rights and dignity of **all** people and promote social justice; combat discrimination, prejudice, xenophobia, and exclusion; tackle inequality in all its dimensions; and ensure that benefits of development are equitably shared.

**While we have clearer understanding of who are being left behind and why, deepening our understanding on multiple factors that lead to the situation is critical.**

**This is necessary to implement the concrete action plans that are needed.**



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For example, 47 per cent of countries still have no civil registration and vital statistics systems that can provide critical information to identify exactly who is being left behind.

Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States are particularly far behind. SIDS have been negatively affected by the impact of climate change, especially rising sea levels. With the current pace, it would be difficult for these countries to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

For many developing countries, technological leapfrogging is the only way to catch up to achieve the SDGs and leave no one behind. International cooperation should be coherent and well-coordinated to address the specific needs of vulnerable countries.

Only 13 per cent of countries have allocated budgets for gender-disaggregated data. Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States in particular continue to emphasize that limited resources and capacities for data disaggregation continues to be an obstacle to operationalizing the principle of leaving no one behind.

At the same time, use of data by policymakers is limited, leading to low data demand and use. We need more and better quality disaggregated data. The lack of coordination among donors supporting statistical capacity development is also a challenge. **While timely and disaggregated data is crucial, focusing only on the supply side is not sufficient. It is important to address data demand and use so that data can be relevant and actionable.**

Further investment is necessary to enhance statistical capacities at the national level. An integrated approach should be taken to address multiple dimensions of poverty, inequality and exclusion, and avoid fragmented initiatives at the local level. Structural change is necessary, as a shift towards leaving no one behind requires transformation of deeply rooted issues.



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The work of the Human Rights Council, including the special procedures and the Universal Periodic Review, can be very useful in this context by assisting member States to identify individuals and communities who are most marginalized, vulnerable, and at risk for discrimination.

Now, we are already beginning to look ahead and strategize in anticipation of the HLPF in 2019, to be held under the auspices of ECOSOC in July followed by a Summit level HLPF during the General Assembly in September, including a high-level dialogue on Financing for Development. We also look forward to at least 42 countries presenting their VNRs.

It will be an important year, as 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.

The HLPF 2019 will benefit greatly from the contribution of the Human Rights Council, also because its core theme will focus on “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”.

The SDGs under review are also closely tied to human rights issues, particularly SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions; SDG 10 on reducing inequalities; and SDG 13 on climate change. There will be sensitive political differences to navigate, and we should begin laying the groundwork early to support a strong and positive outcome.

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.

Together we must strive to ensure that economic, social and cultural rights are respected and the 2030 Agenda is being implemented.

ECOSOC itself still retains a strong interest in Human Rights which is part of its Charter mandate it receives reports from Office of the High Commissioner for



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Human Rights and from the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This connection led ECOSOC to be part of the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the Declaration on the “Right to Development” when we convened a special event with the participation of your President in Geneva in 2011.

I am positive that we will succeed in working together to achieve our shared aims, and I am looking forward to working closely with you as we move ahead through this year and into 2019.



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