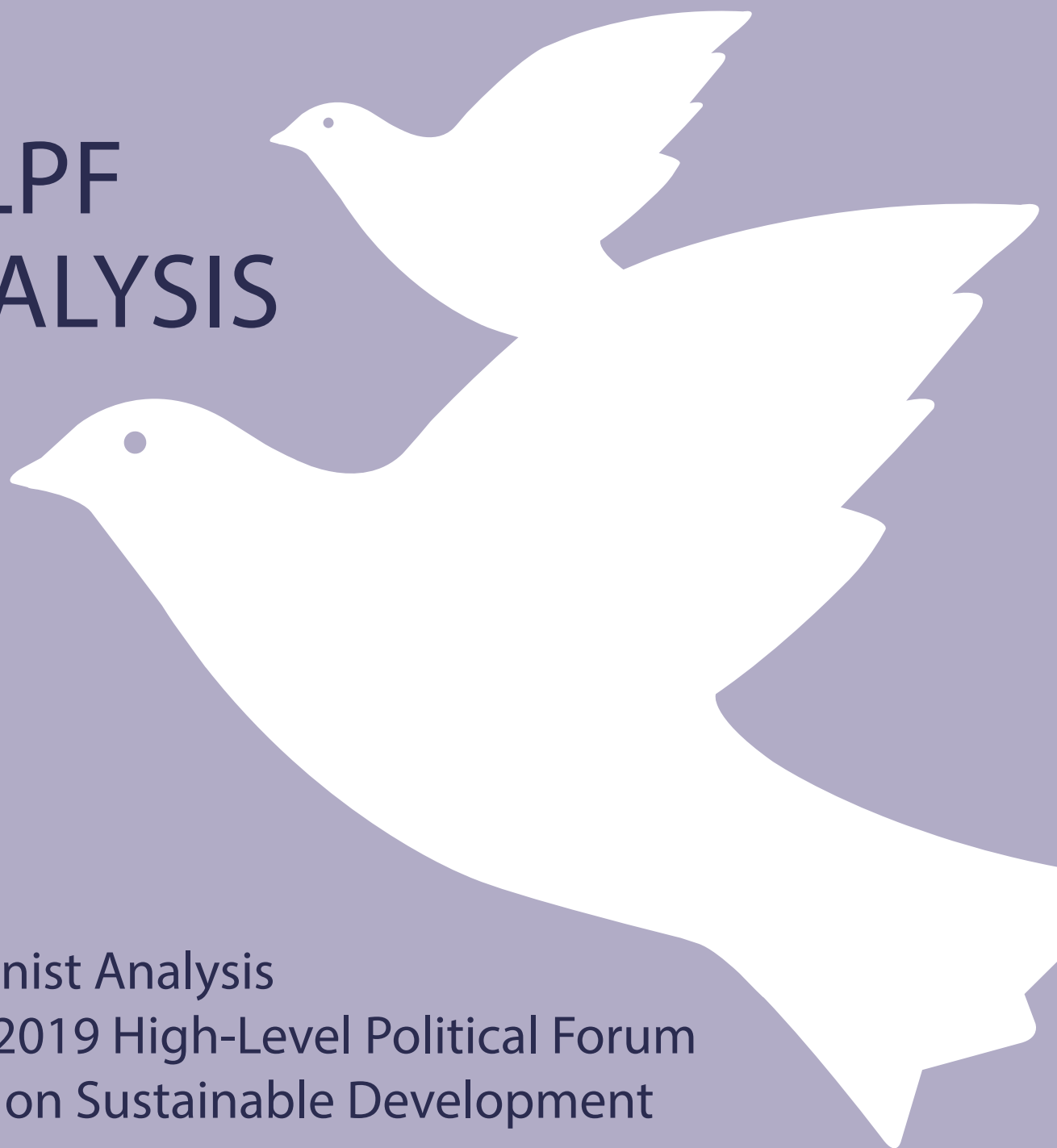


WILPF ANALYSIS



A Feminist Analysis
of the 2019 High-Level Political Forum
(HLPF) on Sustainable Development

WILPF Women, Peace and Security Programme

August 2019

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM



A Feminist Analysis
of the 2019 High Level Political Forum
(HLPF) for Sustainable Development

9-19 July 2019 | United Nations Headquarters, New York



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August 2019 A Feminist Analysis of the 2019
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Sustainable Development
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Background

In 2015 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the universal agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 2030 Agenda, including stand-alone goals on gender equality (Goal 5) and on peaceful and inclusive societies (Goal 16).

In 2019, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the main accountability platform for the SDGs, focused on the priority theme of “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.” For the first time, there was a two-part HLPF: The traditional session under ECOSOC took place 9-19 July 2019. A second ministerial segment is also scheduled for 24-25 September 2019 during the annual [General Assembly](#) General Debate at the level of Heads of State and Government level.

At the July HLPF ECOSOC segment, member states reviewed SDG priority goals on quality education (SDG 4), decent work (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), climate action (SDG 13), peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16) and means of implementation (SDG 17). At the September SDG summit, member states will launch the HLPF Political Declaration, which aims at inspiring action for a decade of delivery on the SDGs (2020-2030). This year also marked the first ever SDGs quadrennial review, which aimed at

assessing progress and modalities for implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and included the development of a [Global Sustainable Development Report](#).

In 2019, 47 countries conducted voluntary national reviews (VNRs) to review national and international action on implementing the 2030 Agenda. Civil society also contributed “spotlight” reports to share independent assessments of progress made. Member states who conducted VNRs included: Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Congo (Republic of the), Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Eswatini, Fiji, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Iceland, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mongolia, Nauru, New Zealand, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Philippines, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Serbia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, and Vanuatu.

Civil society also actively engaged, primarily through the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) system, which provides a formal space for different sectors of society to democratically contribute to formal sustainable development discussions based on Rio Principle 10 which affirms three fundamental principles of access to information, public participation, and justice.¹ As part of this, the Women’s Major Group (WMG) continued to be a driving force across the MGoS system to advocate for progressive feminist demands that address structural obstacles to gender equality, sustainable development and peace as part of its role to facilitate women civil society’s participation into global and regional SDGs discussions at the UN.

¹ There are nine Major Groups, including: Women, Children and Youth, Indigenous Peoples, Nongovernmental Organisations, Local Authorities, Workers and Trade Unions, Business and Industry, Scientific and Technological Community, and Farmers. In addition, there are also eight “Other stakeholders”, which for the first time historically this year, for the first time, included the LGBTI constituency

What did WILPF do?

As part of our work to strengthen a prevention approach to Sustainable Development that promotes gender equality, disarmament, and peace, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) worked with our SDGs coalition, the Women's Major Group, to strengthen coordination and accountability for human rights based and holistic action.

In advance of the 2019 HLPF, WILPF contributed to expert group meetings on [inclusion \(SDG10\), climate \(SDG13\) and peace \(SDG16\)](#) (February 27-28 2019, Vienna) as well as [peaceful societies](#) (27-29 May 2019, Rome). Building on WILPF and coalition input, the [Vienna EGM report](#) affirmed Women's Major Group calls to address structural obstacles to gender equality and peace, including around human rights, tax justice, social protection, extraterritorial accountability, ensuring human rights accountability for transnational corporations, accelerating Women, Peace and Security commitments, and taking action to #MoveTheMoney from war to gender equality and peace. The [Rome Civil Society Declaration](#) also affirmed that “a human rights-based approach to the SDGs is an obligation, not an option”, and called for governments to strengthen interlinkages between action on SDG16+ and the Women, Peace and Security and Youth Peace and Security Agendas.

During the HLPF, for the first time, WILPF hosted a delegation of activist women from the Cameroon, Norway, United Kingdom, and the United States to the HLPF. WILPF supported a Group of Friends of UNSCR 1325 meeting with member states and UN agencies, which brought attention to the need to accelerate WPS implementation as part of action on the SDGs (especially SDG5 and 16), by strengthening policy coherence and coordination and addressing “spillover” effects including arms flows. WILPF's analysis was featured in the 2019 Global Civil Society Report on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (“Spotlight on Sustainable Development 2019”), where WILPF's Women Peace and Security Programme Director, Abigail Ruane, contributed the [chapter on SDG16](#) on peaceful societies calling for a “power shift that re-centres work on equality, development and peace around the voices, human security and rights of women and those most marginalized.” WILPF's delegation also contributed to civil society statements on VNRs in Cameroon and UK, as well as high level meetings with the UN Environment Assembly calling for action on WPS and to address the environmental impact of arms. In all, WILPF contributed to seven events around the HLPF, and engaged in a variety of other bilateral meetings and discussions, including:

- 1) 2 July 2019: [“Feminist Demand: SDG 13 \(Climate Action\) & SDG 16 \(Peace\)”](#) (Women's Major Group Pre-HLPF Webinar with WILPF)
- 2) 8 July 2019: Women's Major Group Orientation and Strategy Meeting (with WILPF)
- 3) 9 July 2019: “Women's and Feminists' Perspectives Toward the High Level Political Forum” (Women's Major Group)
- 4) 11 July 2019: [“Conversation with authors of the global Civil Society Report Spotlight on Sustainable Development 2019 Reshaping governance for sustainability: Transforming institutions – shifting power - strengthening rights”](#) (ANND, DAWN, PSI, GPF, SID, Social Watch, TWN, UNRISD, FES, with WILPF)
- 5) 14 July 2019: [“Ground Level People's Forum”](#) (APWLD, Bayan, CPDE, ESCR-Net, Gabriella, AP-RCEM, WEDO, with WILPF)
- 6) 15 July 2019: [“Sustainable Development and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Synergies for Action”](#) (Closed meeting of the Group of Friends on 1325, with WILPF)

- 7) 15 July 2019: [“Making Sustainable Development work for Women and Girls in Conflict: Strengthening an Integrated Approach to Gender Equality, Sustainable Development, and Peace”](#) (WILPF Closed Workshop)

As a Global Organising partner of the Women’s Major Group, WILPF co-led global coalition advocacy. This included co-leading the development of our coalition [2019 HLPF Position paper](#), which articulated global priorities for the feminist and women’s rights movements on sustainable development addressing this year’s priority goals. “Realising the transformative vision\ of the 2030 Agenda requires creating political rather than technical shifts,” affirmed the paper. “It requires moving from current failed approaches and towards nonviolent, equitable, justice-based, and feminist alternatives that support the participation, rights, livelihoods of those most marginalised and the planet we live in.” Building on this position paper, the Women’s Major Group supported at least 21 civil society interventions, 17 side events, and 7 meetings with delegates. This included WILPF Cameroon President Sylvie Ndongmo presenting the intervention on Financing for Development (FfD) on behalf of the Women’s Major group (see [intervention here](#)). “Financing for development requires changing the rules of the game for development justice and feminist peace,” stated Ms. Ndongmo. “Women’s voices must be at the center of sustainable development and peace.”

WILPF also engaged in outreach to raise the profile of our advocacy. On issues of peace, WILPF continued our [#WomenLead2030](#) Campaign to bring attention to local women’s role in designing peaceful and inclusive societies from the bottom up. We also supported our coalition Women’s Major Group annual “scarves” campaign, which brought attention to different structural obstacles to gender equality and peace through daily color coded scarves. In 2019, the WMG campaign brought attention to austerity, women’s decent work, structural discrimination, climate justice, women human rights defenders, military spending ([#MoveTheMoney](#)), rights based HLPF reform, meaningful participation, and effective means of implementation. Our coalition’s bold and creative actions addressing these themes (such as the [“debt workout”](#) and [“if women stop, the world stops”](#) actions) made gender issues highly visible. In 2019, the Women’s Major Group work was mentioned in at least 19 articles and blog posts. Our coalition campaign reached 5 million people and made 42 million impressions on Twitter (almost double our 3.7 million and 26.6 million impressions in 2018).

Where are we now on the SDGs?

Four years after the 2030 Agenda was adopted, where are we now on the SDGs? Overall, the 2030 Agenda remains one of the best hopes for an integrated approach for people and planet at the UN. Yet it is also one of the biggest disappointments.

Almost a third of the way into the 15 year timeline to realise the SDGs, business as usual is largely continuing. Today we know that although inequalities may have narrowed on health and education, economic and political inequalities are deteriorating.² Only three out of 11 (27 per cent) of peace agreements signed in 2017 contained gender sensitive provisions.³ According to a 2018 UNODC Report, intimate partner violence resulting in women’s deaths is on the rise. In 2017, just eight men

² Gita Sen (2019). "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Feminist Mobilization for the SDGs". *Global Policy*, 10(1): 28-38. Available: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1758-5899.12593>; see also: UN Women (2018). *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Available: www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4332

³ UN Security Council (2018). *Report of the Secretary-General on women peace and security (S/2018/900)*, para. 42.

held the same wealth as the bottom half of humanity⁴, with the top 1% of the world's population capturing twice as much global income growth as the bottom 50% of humanity since 1980.⁵ Women and girls' participation, rights, livelihoods and access to justice remain at the front lines of failures to build sustainable development and peace.

Although the 2030 Agenda is universal and requires policy coherence across the goals, action on the SDGs is “aligning” but not “integrating”: Rather than creating holistic cross-sectoral priorities and strategies that evaluate impacts on people and planet, traditional siloed approaches that promote profit over people and violence over justice are continuing. Rather than accelerating action on disarmament and prioritising social protection and women's human rights, commitments on peace are focusing on domestic action or development aid. Rather than plugging corporate loopholes and ensuring tax justice, private-public partnerships are being touted as a key solution for means of implementation.

Yolanda Joab-Mori, a climate activist from the Federated States of Micronesia and executive director of Island PRIDE, stated at the Opening Session of the HLPF, “Inequality is perpetuated by policy choice. We don't need any more power. What we need is action, and to get there we need courage.” As noted by Diayana Yahaya of the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) current structures rely on the exploitation of people and environment to concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a few at the top margins of societies. Leaving no one behind (“LNOB”) requires shifting the current neoliberal economic system from growth and corporate power towards development justice. As APWLD has [affirmed](#), this requires reduces inequalities of wealth, power and resources, between countries, between rich and poor and between men and women to create redistributive justice, economic justice, social and gender justice, environmental justice, and accountability to the people.

Overall trends: HLPF discussions & Global Sustainable Development Report highlights

Over the two weeks of the July 2019 HLPF, many participants brought attention to “leaving no one behind” as well as the key issues raised in priority goals, including climate change, education, inequalities and peace. However, action to ensure coordination and coherence, much less systemic analysis that takes steps to create systemic change, remain few and far between. In addition, a substantial focus continued to be on the role of public private partnerships and investments for realising the 2030 Agenda. Given that tens of trillions of dollars⁶ escape due to tax and other loopholes each year (in comparison to USD 153.0 billion in 2018 for global development aid⁷), this fails to tackle the root causes of poverty, inequalities, and violence, undermines human rights, and provides a timid and inadequate response to delivering on the 2030 Agenda.

The 2019 [Global Sustainable Development Report](#) (GDSR) provided an important milestone to evaluate action on the agenda and learn from existing practice on how to move forward. A 2019 Global Alliance [Report](#), which reviewed an early draft, notes that the GDSR brings attention to the negative impacts of current militarised approaches to peace and security as not adequately addressed in the SDGs. According to the GDSR: “Ongoing armed conflicts in many parts of the world, which

⁴ Oxfam (2017). “An Economy for the 99%”. Available: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/economy-99>

⁵ IISD (2018). “Experts Discuss Inequality in Preparation for 2019 Report”: Available: www.sdg.iisd.org/news/experts-discuss-inequality-in-preparation-for-2019-report/

⁶ Tax Justice Network (2018). Financial Secrecy Index. <https://financialsecrecyindex.com/en/>

⁷ OECD (2019). “Development aid drops in 2018, especially to neediest countries”.

<http://www.oecd.org/development/development-aid-drops-in-2018-especially-to-neediest-countries.htm>

represent protracted crises that massively impede or even destroy development, are not adequately addressed in the SDGs. Nor is the importance of peace building. In particular, discussion of military spending and arms proliferation is absent, despite overwhelming evidence that the availability of weapons fuels violence and armed conflicts that hamper achievement of specific SDGs, particularly those re-lated to peace and justice, reduced inequalities, and life on land.” This is a critical issue which WILPF has raised repeatedly in our ongoing advocacy for a prevention approach to development that promotes gender equality, disarmament, and peace.

In addition to challenges on prevention and peace, failure to deal with deep rooted inequalities in a coherent way is emerging as a central obstacle to realising the SDGs. According to Women’s Major Group [analysis](#) of the pre-launch version of the GSDR, rising inequalities, climate change, biodiversity loss, and increasing amounts of waste from human activity that are overwhelming natural capacities to process are critical negative trends that must be addressed to get on track. However, women’s rights and human rights are largely absent from the GSDR. As the Women’s Major Group noted, “Gender can and should easily be recognized as one of the levers that will spell the difference between sustainable development and a world where inequalities and injustices systematically persist. Likewise, strengthening linkages between the human rights mechanisms with SDGs, or even strengthening human rights in general, would indicate that the role of human rights in achieving the SDGs is fully recognized.”

Beyond the priority issues areas under discussion at the July HLPF, dialogue also addressed the HLPF Reform process, which will be launched in September 2019 to evaluate and improve the modalities and impact of the HLPF for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In particular, discussions focused on how to make the HLPF “fit for purpose” within broader contexts of UN reform. As part of this, civil society took the lead in pushing for the HLPF to have more “teeth.” Global Policy Forum Board Chair Barbara Adams, in her chapter on democratic global governance of the [2019 Global Civil Society Report on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs](#), called on the HLPF to model a new generation of global governance. SDG monitoring “must break the ‘domestication only’ approach currently dominating the country reporting in the VNRs [Voluntary National Reviews] and address the trade-offs across goals and spill-over effects across borders,” stated Adams. “The SDG Summit in September 2019 and the HLPF review process to take place in 2019-2020 are opportunities to reposition the HLPF” for effectiveness and accountability. “If it doesn’t challenge power it isn’t democratic.” The Women’s Major Group also called for action to strengthen HLPF by enhancing interlinkages with human rights and international law and ensuring the meaningful participation of the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders of civil society, including women civil society. However, it remains to be seen to what extent the HLPF Reform process will position it to be effective in delivering on its mandate for 2030 Agenda accountability.

Highlights from discussions on Peaceful and Inclusive Societies

Official Discussion on SDG16 on peaceful and inclusive societies

On Friday 12 July, the HLPF held the official discussion on SDG16: Peace, justice and strong institutions, in order to review SDG16 implementation and interrelations among the goals. Vice President of ECOSOC, H.E. Mr. Omar Hilale chaired the session and International Development Law Organization (IDLO), Director-General Ms. Irene Khan moderated. Ms. Vibeke Oestreich Nielsen from UN DESA Statistics Division shared a presentation, followed by a keynote speech by former President of Costa Rica H.E. Ms. Laura Chinchilla. Youth and children representatives on

ending violence against children, Charles Young from Jamaica and Ahona Paul from Cambodia shared key messages. After interventions from member states and other stakeholders from the floor, the panel was wrapped up by reflections from three lead discussants: United Arab Emirates State Audit Institution President and Chairman of International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) H.E. Mr. Harib Al Amimi, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities H.E. Mr. Vuk Žugić, and Pastoralists Indigenous NGO's Forum Executive Director and Major Group and Other Stakeholders Representative Mr. Edward Thomas Porokwa. The session closed with interventions from key resource persons: Italian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, H.E. Ms. Emanuela del Re, Argentinian Vice Minister of Justice H.E. Ms. Maria Fernanda Rodriguez, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) President Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, and Mo Ibrahim Foundation Executive Director Mr. Abdoulie Janneh.

This discussion aimed to focus on a diverse array of challenges such as violence against women and children, social cohesion, illicit financial flows, corruption and many others forms of discrimination. Among the [key questions](#) the panelists for this stocktaking session considered included what policy reforms and actions need to be taken at the national and local levels to strengthen the process of SDG16 delivery; how Goal 16 targets and indicators can leverage human rights to inform monitoring and implementation; what sort of key interventions and policies will reach the furthest to the most marginalised; and what urgent capacity needs and gaps are prevalent among government and other stakeholders and how to address these gaps.

According to UN DESA Vibeke Oestreich Nielsen, we are still a long way from realizing the goal of peaceful, just and inclusive societies: the number of people fleeing violent conflict exceeds 70 million, and the United Nations has recorded and verified 397 additional killings of human rights defenders, journalists, and trade unionists across 41 countries in 2018. Former President of Costa Rica H.E. Ms. Chinchilla highlighted the need to bring more children, youth and women into the process of policy making because ‘their vulnerability does not only result from the lack of laws but also from their lack of participation.’ Chinchilla pointed out to the room, “If institutions fail to protect activists, we lose the greatest allies in achieving this agenda.” Mr. Janneh raised the issue of violent conflict, which impedes and extinguishes efforts toward implementation of the Agenda 2030. OSCE Mr. Vuk Žugić brought attention to conflict prevention: “the nexus between peace, security and development is at the core of conflict prevention,” Žugić stated. He called for a holistic approach away from a silo mentality, where we adopt a “whole society approach” and build on regional cooperation to catalyse sustainable peace.

Member state discussion focused on affirming key elements of SDG16 including rule of law and democratic governance, justice, and inclusive institutions. Most contributors affirmed SDG16 as both an enabler and outcome of sustainable development. Belgium, Finland, and the United Kingdom highlighted how disregard for human rights and international humanitarian law provided systemic challenges to the SDGs and Agenda 2030, with indigenous people, women, and civil society becoming increasingly compromised and excluded. They called on Member States to speak out and give a voice to those who suffer. Switzerland, Nigeria, and Qatar were some of the only states that raised issues of armed conflict and violence. As the representative of Nigeria stated, “[t]o prevent conflict and ensure justice, and address inequality and corruption, illicit financial and armed flows must be addressed by all stakeholders.” However, there was otherwise limited to non-existent discussion of root causes such

as weapons proliferation and how current systems are fostering instability, violent conflict, impunity, and curtailment of human rights around the world.

On women and gender, Belgium, Italy, Qatar, Norway, and the OSCE all raised the issue of women's participation; Argentina, Canada, and the Netherlands referenced women's access to justice; France, Bangladesh, and Niger addressed violence against women (VAW); and Switzerland and OSCE raised the issue of women civil society. As Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) President Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron stated, "Less than 25% of seats in parliament are used by women. That means that 75% of the total seats are held by men. This of course is reflected in the agenda." The background note to the discussion also affirmed that gender equality and women's political participation are important markers of inclusive peacebuilding and governance as recognised in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Only three Member States - Canada, Finland, and Spain - referred to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda during the discussion. As the representative of Spain affirmed, "Women, Peace and Security and Youth Peace and Security Agendas are vital to strengthening the role of these groups." While background note to the discussion affirms that UNSCR 1325 "bridges SDGs 16 and 5, reinforcing UN Member States commitments to ensure that women are included and represented in decision-making at all levels in society", this gap illustrates a broader silo between peace and security and development that continues despite commitments to coordination and coherence.

The intervention of Asia Pacific Forum for Women, Law and Development (APWLD) Ms. Diyana Yahaya on behalf of the Women's Working Group on Finance for Development (FfD), was a bright spot in the discussion. Ms. Yahaya spoke on the need to combat illicit flows and tax avoidance by multinational organizations as key issues that are impeding any significant progress on sustainable development. Calling on Member States and other stakeholders to "move beyond the empty rhetoric," Ms. Yahaya stated, "as we have heard [in the session], the private sector has an important role in the implementation of SDGs, and it starts with them paying their taxes." At a time when corporate influence is increasing at the UN and around the world while the voices and rights of people are increasingly restricted, demanding accountability by member states on guaranteeing the rights of people, and refusing to succumb to the rising tide of calls to put private public partnerships as the answer to global challenges is critical.

Side Events on SDG16 on peaceful and inclusive societies

Of the 305 official events that took place during the July 2019 HLPF, 34 focused in some way on peace. Peace-related side events focused on peace, justice, and inclusion. In particular, discussions focused on inequality and exclusion within and between countries; social, political, and economic inclusion; shrinking space for civil society; responsive justice systems and access to justice; and economic development as a way to reduce inequality and contribute to peace. Sub-themes of these events included empowering young people, children and civil society, strengthening justice systems and conflict.

At an event on 17 July hosted by Pathfinders International, Sweden, Korea, Indonesia, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Timor Leste, "Building Momentum on the Grand Challenge on Inequality and Exclusion", Sierra Leone affirmed that inequality is a major driver of armed conflict and Sweden noted that equality reduces the risk of armed conflict. In addition, Timor Leste was exceptional in referencing

implementation of their UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan (NAP) as part of their work on inequality and exclusion, connecting SDG 10 and 16 implementation. Overall, despite some discussion of access to justice, and political participation, consideration of gender was otherwise largely limited to historically feminized areas, such as health, labor market participation, education.

The VNR Lab on peacebuilding and sustaining peace through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on 12 July focused on how states and other stakeholders can engage on the issue of “sustaining peace” and peacebuilding to contribute to the SDGs. Examples of success was an urbanisation response initiative in Freetown, Sierra Leone, where need for services have grown, and the government has had to respond while taking into account needs for services, the environment, and resources. Sarah Hammouda, from the African Union (AU) African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) presented on the mechanism, noting that “things have started to change with the adoption of the peace and security framework in the AU, which is based on early warning and prevention”.

On 17 July, which was International Justice Day, the Mission of Liechtenstein hosted a side event with Argentina, Ecuador, the Netherlands, Norway, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Spain, as well as Parliamentarians for Global Action focused on “The crucial role of international criminal justice in achieving SDG16,” looking closely at how member states and other international partners can support the implementation of SDG16 including by supporting the work of the International Criminal Court and other international justice institutions and initiatives. As the High Level Group [Report on Justice for Women](#) noted, promoting justice requires gender responsive justice institutions. Such action must be holistic and inclusive at both national and international levels.

During an event hosted by the International Peace Institute (IPI), on “Organized Crime, Arms Trafficking, and Illicit Financial Flows: Exploring SDG Target 16.4,” Anna Alvazzi del Frate from Small Arms Survey noted that not only must the isolation of goals be addressed, we must change the language and elaborate on Agenda 2030 to highlight the importance of gender in discussions on the Arms Trade Treaty and the whole spectrum of arms flows, including prevention of illicit production and misuse. This is an important issue, as the SDGs focus on illicit arms flows but do not address how licit flows are deeply interconnected and how both licit and illicit weapons contribute to sexual, gender based and other forms of violence.

During its mission’s side event on 12 July on “Gender Equal Arms Control – Leveraging the 2030 Agenda to Promote Peace”, Germany spoke of three core areas critical to moving forward with the 2030 Agenda. These areas consisted of an agenda for disarmament and how to move towards ‘gender equal arms control’ and amplifying peacebuilders equally; disarmament and silencing guns in Africa; and partnerships for more efficient small arms and light weapons (SALW) control. Sylvie Ndongmo from WILPF-Cameroon spoke from the floor to bring attention to militarism as a key root cause of continuous conflict around the world with disarmament as the only solution.

In terms of prevention more broadly, the 17 July event, “Thinking the three UN pillars together: How protecting human rights helps maintaining peace and security and paves the ground for sustainable development”, hosted by the co-chairs of the Human Rights and Conflict Prevention Caucus with the Mission of Germany and Switzerland was one of the few side events to bring together human rights and prevention with the SDGs. Discussion brought attention to the links between conflict prevention and human rights and ‘shrinking spaces’ or repression and curtailment of civil society. Kate Donald from the Center for Economic and Social Rights pointed out the disconnect between the human rights system and the SDG implementation process employed by many States and other stakeholders.

WILPF and its delegation were among the loudest voices on highlighting need for holistic action on Women, Peace and Security Agenda, disarmament, and the SDGs. Member states including Germany, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Switzerland, Qatar, and African Union also brought attention to armed violence during HLPF discussions. During a meeting of the Group of Friends of UNSCR 1325 featuring WILPF hosted by Canada, on “Sustainable Development and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Synergies for Action,” WILPF contributors called on arms exporting countries to strengthen action on Women, Peace and Security and disarmament as priorities for the 2030 Agenda, including by not transferring weapons if there is a risk that the weapons will be used to facilitate gender based violence. As WILPF Cameroon President Sylvie Ndongmo noted, “We must address the hidden interests in fragility.”

However, in the majority of sessions covered by WILPF there were no references to disarmament. This is a critical challenge for work to implement commitments on the SDGs especially on SDG16 on peaceful and inclusive societies: The proliferation of weapons leads to gender-based violence, including sexual violence against women and girls and other marginalised groups like men and boys who do not conform to the status quo. According to the UN Secretary General’s 2018 Agenda for Disarmament: as a contribution to SDG 5 on violence against women (Target 5.2), all states take action in line with the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) gender criterion to refrain from authorising arms export if there is an overriding risk of gender based violence. However, there has been low effort by countries to address the role of weapons in fomenting and exacerbating violence and conflict. In addition, there remains clear silos across peace and development action that limit opportunities to realise the transformative intent of the 2030 Agenda. As WILPF has affirmed in the past, there can be no sustainable development without disarmament and women’s human rights.

Highlights from discussions on inclusion and gender equality

Goal 5 on achieving gender equality was not a review goal in 2019. Out of the 305 official meetings and side events listed on the UN’s official HLPF daily programmes of work, only nine focused explicitly on gender and the SDGs. These events varied widely: from “Reducing Gender and Economic Inequalities to Achieve SDGs & End Child Poverty” (World Vision) to “Breaking Silos: Showcasing Integrated Solutions to Help Achieve SDG 16, Gender and Land Related SDGs” (the Government of Germany and the Working Group on Peace and Development (FriENT)) and from “Briefing and Reception: Interactive dialogue on gender-responsive budgeting for sustainable development” (UN Women) to “Making evaluation work for SDG-4, Target 5: Gender parity, equality and inclusion in education” (The United Nations Children’s Fund).

At the 9 July Opening of the HLPF, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Vice President H.E. Mr. Valentin Rybakov shared [key messages](#) from ECOSOC Integration Segment. “There is a need to ensure women’s engagement and participation in all stages of peace processes,” stated Rybakov. “We also need to address the burden of unpaid care and domestic work on women and girls, which hinder their participation in education and employment.” Speaking on meaningful participation during the July 12 “Gender Equal Arms Control – Leveraging the 2030 Agenda to Promote Peace,” Germany connected the importance of meaningful participation of women with gender equality at large, encouraging States to think through the SDGs through an interconnected framework. Speaking at the July 15 Friends of 1325 meeting on WPS and the SDGs, Emilia Reyes of Equidad Genero noted, “Global challenges require global consensus. States must take action because they have the capacity

to address the issues, and not just as donors in the ODA [official development assistance] conversation but in a larger way.”

Outside of these discussions, there was limited focus on gender issues across the HLPF. On issues of protection, discussions focused largely on social protection, development for youth, access to quality education, traditional livelihoods, resources, and systems of justice. Although women in the informal economy face discrimination, violence, and precarious conditions to their livelihoods, there were limited links made between weak social protection and social exclusion, and gender based and other forms of violence. On issues of justice and accountability, discussions addressed systems of justice, tax justice, corruption, environment, and development, including in the context of discrimination and inequalities. However, accountability and justice for women’s rights was not extensively addressed. Finally, women human rights defenders and human rights defenders were also referenced only limitedly as well.

As IDLO Director-General Irene Khan stated at the July 12 official dialogue on [SDG16, Peace, justice and strong institutions](#), a people centered approach where collective energy reaches those that are farthest behind must be central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Prioritising systems of gender justice that support women’s meaningful participation, protection, and rights across the conflict spectrum must be a key priority for the SDGs and peace.

Despite challenges to integrate gender analysis of structural obstacles in discussions, the Women’s Major Group was consistent in raising issues of gender equality and women’s rights throughout the HLPF. **The following statements are some of the highlights from Women’s Major Group interventions:**

“We live in a patriarchal world, which leaves many people behind, especially women and girls, and particularly in the global south.”

-- [Elizabeth Ampairewe](#), *Forum for Women in Democracy (Uganda)*, 9 July Opening of the HLPF

“Developed countries must take responsibility for contributions to shared commons. Africa is losing approximately US\$50 billion annually through illicit financial flows. This results in high levels of poverty, inequality, inadequate provision of social services, and dysfunctional public institutions, which entrench gender inequality.”

-- [Chika Mercedes Ibeh](#), *Education as a Vaccine (Nigeria)*, 10 July discussion on LDCs and LLDCs.

“Proposing public-private partnerships as a solution, totally misses the mark! ...Repeatedly, we raise the alarm of growing corporate power at the expense of women and peoples’ rights, and our environment. We must act. Governments must act.”

-- [Sarankhubuu Sbaravdorj](#), *Centre For Human Rights and Development (Mongolia)*, 11th July discussion of Science policy interface including Global Sustainable Development Report

“Unless the root causes of inequalities are addressed, it is going to become harder to achieve the SDGs. People will rise and resist and we, women, will begin with the Global Women’s Strike next International Women’s Day because if women stop, the world stops!”

-- [Nalini Singh](#), *Fiji Women’s Rights Movement and APRCEM*, 11th July discussion on reducing inequality within and among countries

“Today, there is no country in the world that is free from conflict, because violence against women and girls exists everywhere. Financing for development requires changing the rules of the game for development justice and feminist peace.”

-- [Sylvie Jacqueline Ndongmo](#), *WILPF Cameroon*, 15 July 2019 discussion on *Financing the SDGs*

“[I]t is imperative that SIDS governments take a human rights-based approach with a clear justice-focused definition of prosperity that fully recognizes justice for ecological sustainability, climate and development.”

-- [Amasai Jeke](#), *Rainbow Pride Foundation*, 10th July thematic review on *Small Island Developing States*

“Development policies need to be aligned with the broader framework of just and equitable transition anchored on development justice and reforming the current predatory extractivism model of development.”

-- [Chantal Umuboza](#), *SPECTRA (Rwanda)*, 7th July discussion during *Perspectives of Society*

Key gaps: Policy coherence and “spillover” effects

Despite this year's clear demonstration of the need to address our interconnections in the priority goals, discussions at the HLPF continued to be focused largely on national action and development aid initiatives. Only nine (or 3%) of the 305 official meetings and side events listed on the UN's official HLPF daily programmes of work specifically addressed the need for an integrated approach and/or policy coherence. While many official events centred on “multilateralism,” “working together,” “partnerships” (including partnerships with the private sector) and the need for the development of “integrated approaches” to arrive at “shared solutions”, more targeted action is needed to address “spillover” effects and effective mechanisms to ensure policy coherence and coordination.

There were some important steps forward to address these issues. At the 9 July Opening of the HLPF, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Vice President H.E. Mr. Valentin Rybakov shared [key messages](#) from the ECOSOC Integration Segment: “The subsidiary bodies and the UN system recognize that all this means that we need a profound overhaul of our current development models. [...] It is widely agreed that four years into the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, many policies, legislation and investments still fail to consider the potential trade-offs and synergies between the SDGs, namely the impacts of measures in one sector on other sectors, groups of people, and countries, as well as the consequences for future generations [...] Integrated policies are one of the key transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda and a tool for accelerating progress.” Mr. Rybakov continued: “we need to carry out a deep review of macro-economic and fiscal policies to ensure that they do not push people further behind and help direct resources where they will have the greatest impact on the SDGs, human rights and gender equality [...] An integrated approach to the SDGs also requires a focus on the peace and security, human rights, and development nexus.”

At the 9 July VNR Lab on “[achieving policy integration](#)”, participants explored how to strengthen coordination and coherence among fiscal, monetary, trade and development policy objectives taking into account cross-sectional and inter-generational trade-offs. This included addressing issues of spillovers, public spending, budgeting, support for social services, and exchange rate policy. According to Mr. Hamid Rashid, Chief of the Development Research Branch of the Economic Analysis and

Policy Division within the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), “we must rethink policies that are cross cutting to make policy integration a reality.”

The 15 July event hosted by Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and GIZ, on “The Role of Spillover Effects in SDG Implementation,” was exceptional in its focus on how to address spillovers as part of effective action on the 2030 Agenda. During the event, Dr. Ingolf Dietrich from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development brought attention to the need to take into account “global footprints.” “We need to put spillover effects at the centre of attention,” stated Dietrich. Jeffrey Sachs, Director of SDSN, Center for SD, Columbia University, presented a keynote address outlining three main categories of spillovers: environmental spillovers (i.e., pollutants, global emissions), economics and finance spillovers (i.e., tax havens, banking secrecy, race to the bottom in labour standards), and conflict and arms spillovers (i.e., arms transfers, sanctions). Negative spillovers occur when stakeholders take deliberate action to provide a benefit themselves while imposing a cost on others. “The US is emitting more greenhouse gases, contributing to tax distortion, contributing to war and violence than any other by far. And it is doing it deliberately. This is what we are trying to measure,” stated Sachs. “It is a real externality when someone drops a bomb on your head.” Annika Lindblom, from the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development, noted that Finland has developed indicators for sustainability and policy coherence. Seema Joshi, of Amnesty International, encouraged convergence of SDSN work with human rights work: “How are human rights abuses being identified and addressed? How are environmental impacts measured?” she asked. Although the SDSN is working on mapping tools to address spillovers, it does not currently address arms flows or financial flows, which are key issues for sustainable development. SDSN noted that data remains an obstacle to addressing arms as a spillover in their mapping tools.

Opportunities: Strengthening human rights for gender justice

Despite challenges, there are opportunities to strengthen coordination and coherence for gender equality and peace. One opportunity at the national level is building on the role of parliaments. During the 12 July official discussion of SDG16, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron stated, “When we’re talking about peace, justice and institutions we are sometimes forgetting that these institutions are designed in the parliament and coming from our own constitutions...The real priorities of our countries should be reflected in the budget. We also have responsibilities for oversight and for representation. Less than 25% of seats in parliament are used by women. That means that 75% of the total seats are held by men. This of course is reflected in the agenda...We need to design institutions in accordance with challenges and put people at the center.” At a 17 July roundtable addressing how the SDGs can thrive in adverse political contexts, participants noted that gender parity laws for parliaments that can be used to support increasing numbers of feminists in parliaments who can accelerate good laws that are not being implemented. In places like Uruguay, parliamentarians are also starting to include 2030 Agenda language when passing new laws. The role of parliaments and budgetary committees will be crucial to respond to calls by WILPF and others to #MoveTheMoney from war to gender equality and peace.

Another opportunity at the national level is SDG coordination bodies and human rights institutions. The TAP Network [Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit](#) notes that SDG Policy Coordination mechanisms such as national cabinet interministerial SDG working groups, national sustainable development councils, as well as national human rights institutions and [supreme audit offices](#) all have roles to play in ensuring implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including SDG16. At the 10 July event on “Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality Through Human Rights”, UN Office of the High

Commissioner for Human Rights Development & Economic & Social Issues Branch Chief Mr. Craig Mokhiber affirmed, “The only course left to us is human rights-based sustainable development through the SDGs.” European Network of Equality Bodies (Equinet) Policy Officer Moana Genevy also recommended strengthened coordination and deeper integration of regional bodies into strategies for achieving sustainable development and SDG 10. Finally, during the 9 July discussion on [Progress, gaps and obstacles: are we on track for leaving no one behind?](#), Marta Acosta, Auditor General of Costa Rica and representative of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) also affirmed the role of Supreme Audit Institutions in accountability for coordination and coherence. In Latin America, audit institutions carried out an audit on SDG 5 in 15 countries which showed that the institutional mechanisms exist, but they are not being implemented. Strengthening coordination mechanisms for human rights based coherence should be a critical priority for moving forward.

Beyond this, we need to create a more just system for gender equality and peace. As the [Women's Major Group position paper](#) outlines, there are key priorities that can be taken to guide action moving forward:

- Finance and trade rules that restrict poor countries’ policy space to follow their human rights and development objectives must change;
- Militarized economies must shift to economies guided by human security of all;
- Action must be taken to remain under 1.5 degrees, ensuring ecosystem integrity while promoting gender-responsive climate action and women’s participation;
- Macroeconomic dynamics must be reformed to address illicit financial flows, unfair trade rules, debt unsustainability, and developing countries’ right to development;
- Corporations must pay taxes, refrain from predatory practices, and ensure labour rights and decent work and working conditions;
- Social protection must be prioritised over private investment, austerity measures should not be implemented if they undermine social protection including life-long education and learning.

As our coalition has affirmed, accountability cannot be postponed. The HLPF must be transformed so that it can deliver follow-up and review processes needed to advance the 2030 Agenda for women and girls of every age, place, ability and status.

Conclusion

This year’s focus on priority goals -- including on inequalities, climate, peace, and decent work -- shone a spotlight on the global and interconnected nature of our world. It set the stage for what could have been the most exciting space yet at the UN to tackle structural obstacles to gender equality, development and peace.

Unfortunately, however, most discussions missed the mark on this unique opportunity. Structural issues such as tax justice and plugging of illicit financial flows, arms control and disarmament regulation to prevent exports of violence, and regulation to address the climate crisis remained limited. While many -- governments, UN, and even some civil society -- touted particular projects, few addressed “spillover” effects in which there are impacts beyond borders. As a result, discussions tended toward a carnival of pet projects, rather than a space that could tackle systemic issues of power, privilege, violence, and justice.

There remains a need to integrate inclusionary policies and approaches that reflect the interlinkages between human rights and the SDGs and moves away from violence, discrimination and exploitation. This means that national budgets and approaches to the SDGs must have a gendered approach that accounts for issues of gender equality and peace as well as the rights violations, risks and devastation posed by arms flows, armed violence, destruction of the environment and climate change to the prevalence and occurrence of conflicts and instability. To address spillover effects, and mitigate the detrimental impact on communities and regions, there must be strengthened policy coherence that also addresses violence due to arms transfers, inequalities and discrimination. There must also be a global architecture for feminist peace and development justice.

As Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Vice President H.E. Mr. Valentin Rybakov [stated](#) at the 9 July Opening of the HLPF, “achieving the SDGs requires an immediate change in course where the pledge to leave no one behind is fulfilled on the basis of internationally agreed principles and standards of human rights.”

Moving forward, WILPF has spearheaded an open letter to Friends of UNSCR 1325 with over 82 signatories - including the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security and the Women’s Major Group on Sustainable Development - urging governments to:

1. commit to accelerating action on Women, Peace and Security as part of 24-25 September Sustainable Development Summit commitments on gender equality and peaceful and inclusive societies,
2. strengthen interlinkages between policies that deal with sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, and peace and security, and
3. support reforms to the High-Level Political Forum to strengthen effectiveness, accountability, and meaningful participation of civil society.

As [WILPF engagement](#) at the forum highlighted, we need to raise the bar on sustainable development to strengthen women’s participation, protection, and rights across the conflict spectrum. “We need a power shift that re-centres work on equality, development and peace around the voices, human security and rights of women and those most marginalized,” stated WILPF Women, Peace and Security Programme Director Abigail Ruane at the launch of the open letter. “The Women, Peace and Security Agenda is a critical tool for creating the world we want and need.”