

# 2019 Sustainable Development Summit

UN General Assembly Segment of the High Level Political Forum

An analysis by

the **Women's International League for Peace & Freedom (WILPF)**

## **Women, Peace and Security Programme**

### **Overview**

On 24-25 September, heads of state gathered at UN Headquarters in New York for the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDG\) Summit](#) to review progress and identify measures to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The SDG Summit was chaired by the President of the General Assembly and resulted in a [political declaration](#). It constituted the second segment of the 2019 [High Level Political Forum](#) (HLPF: UN General Assembly segment), and was marked by a series of high-level meetings bringing together political and thought leaders, the private sector, civil society and international organizations to discuss and mobilise for accelerated action on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by its 2030 deadline.

WILPF believes that the SDGs can be a critical tool for preventing conflict. Their vision of sustainable development for people and planet, and commitment to policy coherence creates the best opportunity yet for the international community to design development and peace for equality, participation, non-discrimination, and justice. As part of our work on leveraging the SDGs to accelerate the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) monitored the SDG Summit with a focus on gender equality, peaceful societies, and means of implementation.

As a whole, the SDG Summit showed a clear recognition that the international community is failing to take the action needed to realise the 2030 Agenda. Participating stakeholders focused on the need for urgent action and continued multilateral action in order to put "people and planet at the center". However, there remained a clear disconnect between the transformative vision of

the SDGs and the risk-averse and incremental approach being taken by governments to implement the agenda.

On one hand, there was significant exchanges of experience and lessons learned on how to move forward. Discussion brought attention to the importance of enhancing policy coordination and coherence, such as through national and regional SDG coordination committees, councils, and secretariats, as well as ensuring an international enabling environment for national action. It highlighted the need to strengthen social protections, including via responsive taxation, budgets, and plugging of illicit financial flows. It brought up the need for inclusive engagement, including having diverse civil society and other stakeholder consultations and leadership, and acting based on principles of gender parity. It also raised issues of wealth inequality, social protections, and alternative indicators for success (i.e., “national happiness” instead of GDP as a baseline), as well as exploring cross cutting measures, including on women’s rights and transborder flows (especially around climate), for action.

On the other hand, there was a continued focus on the SDGs as a development aid project, and continued efforts to have corporations invest in public-private partnerships to realise the agenda. This narrow and incremental approach poses major challenges to creating the “world we want” for people and planet.

Overall, the bulk of the discussion failed to tackle the systemic obstacles to sustainable development, gender equality, and peace. If stakeholders are unwilling or unable to tackle systems of power, we will not realise the vision of the 2030 Agenda. Addressing ongoing silos between development on the one hand and peace and security on the other, and ensuring substantive rather than superficial approaches to gender equality will be critical for moving forward.

### **SDG Summit Opening**

On the afternoon of 24 September 2019, the SDG Summit opened, by setting the scene and taking stock of progress, challenges, and opportunities on SDG implementation. “We are off track,” stated UN Secretary-General António Guterres, noting that conflict, climate crisis, gender based violence, and wealth inequality are all undermining SDG efforts. “No country is on track to meeting the goal of gender equality, without which none of the goals will be met.” UN President of the General Assembly Tijjani Muhammad Bande (Indonesia) noted that member states must address the lives of people in developing countries, small island states, countries in conflict and post-conflict situations, and middle-income countries who live below the poverty line. “We need to accelerate efforts and aim much higher,” stated President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Mona Juul, adding that “inequality remains unacceptably high between and in countries.” All three speakers highlighted the importance of including youth in partnerships

geared toward SDG implementation. Ms. Juul called on all stakeholders to “heed the call of our youth for investing in a sustainable planet.” UN SG Guterres also spoke on the need to make greater progress on “fighting the illicit flow of capital, money laundering and tax evasion to better support developing countries”.

Following preliminary interventions, contributors to the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GDSR) engaged in a “fireside chat” dialogue on the global report. “Has it become easier to imagine the end of humanity, or changing our systems?” asked University of Bern Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) Mr. Peter Messerli. Authors affirmed the importance of policy coherence for realising the 2030 Agenda. “We cannot progress if we continue ticking off single SDGs,” stated Mr. Messerli. “In the past, by pursuing a single goal, we’ve failed,” stated University of the West Indies (UWI) Institute for Sustainable Development Mr. David Smith. “We cannot implement goals one by one,” stated Republic of Indonesia National Development Planning Agency (BAPPENAS) Ms. Endah Murniningtyas.

What is the alternative to business as usual? “Our evidence is clear. We need to achieve a new relationship between people and nature,” stated Mr. Peter Messerli. Eun Mee Kim of the Ewha Womans University Graduate School of International Studies reminded the international community that gender equality must be a central principle for action. “If we cannot tackle this [gender inequality], we cannot achieve SDGs that leave no one behind,” stated Eun Mee Kim. “We must see the 2030 Agenda as a shared compass for all stakeholders,” stated Ms. Endah Murniningtyas.

## **Plenary**

The SDG Summit’s first plenary included remarks by 8 groups of states and four individual states. This included: the Group of 77 and China (by Palestine), the Group of Least Developed Countries (by Malawi), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (by Thailand), the Caribbean community (by Saint Lucia), African states (by Uganda), the European Union, the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries (by Paraguay), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and Middle Income Countries (by El Salvador), as well as the Holy See, Surinam, China, UK, and Chad.

One focus was on global challenges and responsibility for extraterritorial ‘spillover effects’, predominantly for the issue of climate change. Malawi, on behalf of the Group of Least Developed Countries, brought attention to global injustices around climate change, noting that the countries that suffer the most from the devastations of climate change are not the countries who contribute the most -- and who continue to pollute and contribute to climate change. “Attenuating the drivers and risks of climate change are hardly within our control,” stated Belize, on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States. “This is a result of global inaction first and foremost by those with historic responsibilities. ... There’s no time to spare.” Saint Lucia, on behalf of the Caribbean Community, also highlighted the need to address issues of global commons.

“We don't want to be the object of permanent charity,” stated Paraguay, on behalf of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries. “We ask for cooperation to strengthen our capacities, so that we can solve our own problems in the near future and contribute to the causes of universal relevance.” Again in relation to “spillover effects” transborder flows, the representative of Chad brought attention to illicit trafficking of weapons (SDG 16.4) as an obstacle to achieving SDGs and eradicating poverty. “We must not say ‘leave no one behind’ just as an empty phrase. We have to work all of us for the good of our people and countries.”

Although not an explicit focus, the remarks of some speakers raised issues of development justice. Palestine, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, as well as Uganda, on behalf of African States, affirmed the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) -- a principle from the 1992 Rio Declaration that supports substantive equality between developing and developed states by placing more responsibility on wealthier countries and those more responsible for causing specific global problems. The G77 also affirmed the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, and called for strengthening means of implementation across Addis's seven action areas (domestic public resources, domestic and international private business and finance, international development cooperation, international trade as an engine for development, debt and debt sustainability, addressing systemic issues, and science, technology, innovation, and capacity-building). “How have we been improving on the wellbeing of our people while protecting the environment?” asked the representative of Suriname, bringing attention to the need to remove legal barriers to SDG principles and protect vulnerable populations through macroeconomic reforms that ensure broad social safety nets. “Let's set our watches,” stated the representative of Palestine on behalf of the G77. “The lives of our people and the fate of our planet and all life in its home rely on our ability to deliver on our commitments.”

A common message from the plenary was the need to do away with the implementation of the SDGs as a “one size fits all” model and to acknowledge the unique needs of states with differing resources. In line with this call, speaker states urged for universal accountability of implementation, asking the international community to stand behind their commitments and assist developing nations for the acceleration of the 2030 Agenda. As part of this, there was a strong call to tackle global challenges through effective multilateral action, especially around issues such as the climate crisis. Reiterating the call for accountability across nations, Palestine emphasized the need for “a more just and equitable international economic system that offers opportunities to raise the standard of living of our people.” Although the issues raised were often general and veiled, discussions raised the key issues of extraterritorial accountability, transnational flows, and development justice for delivering on the promise of leaving no one behind.

## **Leaders Dialogue 1: Megatrends Impacting the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals**

The final session of the first day of the SDG Summit was a “leaders dialogue” addressing “Megatrends Impacting the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals” including climate change, global conflicts, equal access to resources, and sustainable growth. During the session, 8 member states and representatives from the World Bank and Global Indigenous Youth Caucus discussed ways to address the opportunities and challenges that current and future critical global trends may have on the implementation of the SDGs. The discussion was moderated by President of the Republic of Ghana H.E. Mr. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo and Prime Minister of Norway H.E. Ms. Erna Solberg. Participants included representatives from: Turkey, Colombia, Estonia, Nigeria, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Japan, Slovenia, the World Bank Group, and the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus.

“The global response so far has not been ambitious and transformative enough,” stated Co-moderator and President of the Republic of Ghana H.E. Mr. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo. “The pace of our collective effort is not fast enough” agreed the other Co-moderator and Prime Minister of Norway H.E. Ms. Erna Solberg.

A number of states brought up that peace must be central to Agenda 2030 implementation. “No country can have Sustainable Development without peace and security,” stated the representative of Ukraine. “The increase in defense spending is an indication that the security environment is not improving, but mistrust is growing,” stated the representative of Bulgaria, also affirming the importance of developing a culture of peace. Colombia shared their four year plan, called a “covenant for Colombia and equality” that aligns with the SDGs and affirmed realising gender parity in their cabinet. “Facing goal 16, we can build up a national policy in this regard and move forward with the successful process working with those who believe in justice and truth,” the Colombian representative stated. Turkey highlighted the impact of the refugee crisis from Syria on capacity to deliver on the SDGs. “We need to take into account Least Developed Countries and refugees.”

Ms. Jessica Ortega, Co-Chair, Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, underscored the need to hold states accountable for their international obligations, and stated that policies that are driven by militarism and neoliberal capitalism are further marginalizing societies. Ms. Ortega also mentioned the importance of grassroots activism to challenge such policies and drew attention to the attacks against human rights defenders and climate activists as well as systemic exclusion of indigenous people, stating “The more you deny our rights, the more we will rise up.... Our pledge of ‘leaving no one behind’ is lip service unless we take all measures.”

Another key highlight was on reducing gaps in implementing SDGs while ensuring that all people are included and provided equal access to the results. “[G]irls deserve social services, education for their children, and later on retirement,” stated the representative of Estonia. “How do we guarantee in this new world? ...[W]e must quickly remedy this, and we can only solve it globally together.” Touching upon the importance of gender equality, Colombia mentioned that the country has a woman Vice President, a cabinet composed of an equal number of men and

women, and that they support a council of women entrepreneurs. However, throughout Day 1 of the SDG Summit, only 13.4% of over 100 speakers, -- including Fiji, Ireland, Spain, Netherlands, and Tunisia -- touched on the importance of gender equality and peace in the achievement of the SDGs.

Civil society organizations have called for tax justice in order to achieve the 2030 agenda and reduce inequalities, including gender inequality. The representative of Nigeria highlighted the importance of minimizing tax evasion, and Norway called attention to “well-functioning tax system[s]” to address wealth gaps and ensure public services including quality education -- an issue of critical importance for ensuring gender equality in the context of women’s unpaid and devalued care work.

In terms of mechanisms for policy coherence in order to support more equitable and peaceful outcomes, the representative of Nigeria also highlighted their Presidential Council and inter-ministerial committee on SDGs as institutional frameworks that support implementation of SDG commitments.

The key takeaway from the session was to accelerate the pace through which member states are implementing the SDGs. Finally, there was also a call to put words into action regarding the commitment to leave no one behind.

## **Leaders Dialogue 2: Accelerating the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals: Critical Entry Points**

The second day of the SDG Summit started off with the event entitled “Leaders Dialogue 2: Accelerating the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals: Critical Entry Points.” The discussion was moderated by President of Costa Rica Mr. Carlos Alvarado Quesada and Prime Minister of Iceland Ms. Katrín Jakobsdóttir. During the session, 9 member states and representatives from La Via Campesina and the Food and Agriculture Organization discussed critical entry points to accelerate the implementation of SDGs. Participants included representatives from: Egypt, Montenegro, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Kiribati, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and La Via Campesina organisation.

Among the key takeaways from the session was the need to strengthen mechanisms that enable an integrated approach which recognize the interconnected nature of the SDGs and their respective challenges, and engage multiple stakeholders to create ownership of and accelerate progress of SDGs. Panelists identified various pressing challenges, including the financing of their national goals, especially for low-income countries, mitigating the effects of climate change, and possible paths of action to address them. Overall, the panel highlighted that the successful

implementation of the SDGs is a global endeavor and reinforced the need to foster and strengthen collaborative efforts to accelerate the 2030 Agenda.

Highlighting the findings of the [Global Sustainable Development Report](#) (GSDR), the session co-moderator, Ms. Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Prime Minister of Iceland underscored that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) “need to become the guiding light in all public policy making” to reduce inequalities. She highlighted how implementing universal child care, gender budgeting, and analyzing how public financing works differently for men and women, can enable governments to change priorities that change structures of society and “ensure our measurements do not just focus on GDP but also on what matters.” In a similar vein, co-moderator President of Costa Rica Mr. Carlos Alvarado Quesada shared about how Costa Rica signed a national pact with different stakeholders, and relies on a national SDG secretariat to foster interlinkages and tailor policies to eliminate inequality, including through integrated budgets.

One key highlight was the need to focus on removing barriers for women and girls to fully exercise their rights. Kenya, for instance, elaborated on the country’s reentry policy, implemented for girls who would like to resume schooling after having abandoned their studies. The country is also providing free sanitary towels as a means to support girls in schools. While sharing positive policy implementations and outcomes, member states also expressed concern about challenges to future progress. The Netherlands, for instance, highlighted the threat against advancements made on sexual health and reproductive rights while also calling for an environment where women can exercise their full potential so that they can contribute to the 2030 vision as equal partners. However, the need for demilitarization and investing in political economies of peace was largely absent from the panelists’ discussion of sustainable development.

The need for an integrated approach was another key focus. “If we want to reach the goals, we must adopt a transformative approach at a global scale,” stated the representative of the Netherlands. They called for action on three entry points: 1) an economy that respects our planet (tackling overconsumption through a circular economy by 2050), 2) global justice to ensure exercise of rights, and 3) women’s rights, including sexual and reproductive rights. The issue of environmental sustainability was a key focus in this regard, both to mitigate the effects of climate change and to reduce the world’s current consumption patterns. Iceland’s affirmation of gender budgeting and Costa Rica’s affirmation of national SDG secretariats both highlighted mechanisms that can foster interlinkages. Peru noted that national action frameworks on climate with cross-cutting measures on gender, culture, and generations can improve policies and plans at all levels of government in interrelated way. Montenegro also highlighted how national Sustainable Development Councils can contribute to horizontal strategic planning that aligns different stakeholders and addresses positive and negative spillovers in line with leaving no one behind.

### **Leaders Dialogue 3: Measures to Leverage Progress Across the Sustainable Development Goals**

The second event of the SDG Summit's second day was entitled "Leaders Dialogue 3: Measures to Leverage Progress Across the Sustainable Development Goals." The President of the Republic of Finland, Mr. Sauli Niinisto, and Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda Mr. Gaston Browne co-moderated the discussion. During the session, 6 member states and representatives from Economic Commission for Africa and Mastercard discussed possible pathways to accelerate the SDGs. Participants included: Kazakhstan, Spain, North Macedonia, Tajikistan, Ireland, Jamaica, the Economic Commission for Africa (on behalf of the UN's five regional commissions) and Mastercard.

Similarly to the day's first session, Leaders Dialogue 2, there was a focus on the need to employ an integrated framework and a multi-stakeholder approach to implementing the SDGs. Panelists also focused on the importance of partnerships in providing equal opportunities, especially for states with limited means, to overcome roadblocks.

President of the Republic of Finland and session co-moderator Mr. Sauli Niinisto started the conversation by highlighting the importance of using the levers of change identified in the [Global Sustainable Development Report](#) (GSDR): by using governance, economy, finance, individual, and collective action, and science and technology, the international community can accelerate action on the SDGs. This resonates with longstanding calls by women peacebuilders, who have said repeatedly that peace is not a project.

The discussions highlighted mechanisms that could be used to take steps to redesign economies and societies for sustainable development and peace. Mr. Niinisto affirmed that there needs to be a "whole-society approach to completing the 2030 Agenda" and that the "common denominator of all action should be sustainability" in work done towards achieving the SDGs. He also referenced the [2019 Helsinki Principles](#), which aim to contribute to stopping climate change through legislation, taxation, budgets, and investments that address the demands of climate. Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa Ms. Vera Songwe, on behalf of the UN's five regional commissions, brought attention to transnational accountability and an enabling environment for sustainable development. "We are working on issues of domestic resource mobilization, but this also includes our sisters and brothers in Europe," she stated. "We need them to ensure that illicit financial flows can be arrested and ensure that the developing countries keep the resources they need to ensure girls' education, maternal health, and infrastructure." North Macedonia also affirmed the importance of public finance well in providing services and catalyzing SDG implementation. Beyond resourcing, Ireland also brought attention to extraterritorial accountability within the context of peace and security: they affirmed their work including on disarmament and human rights as part of meeting global responsibilities, which they would continue to maintain if elected to the UN Security Council in 2020. Beside Ireland, only Samoa connected the issue of disarmament with sustainable development for the future.

In addition to tackling “spillover effects” including illicit financial flows and tax evasion, other speakers highlighted coordination mechanisms that can contribute to policy coherence and holistic accountability. Kazakhstan proposed the establishment of a regional UN center in Kazakhstan to “strengthen cohesive collaboration and partnerships” to accelerate the SDGs in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Tajikistan shared about how its National Development Council facilitates implementation of the SDGs by working with 13 working groups on different themes to implement the SDGs nationally and locally in 4 key areas.

The issue of inclusion was a key highlight of the session, where panelists underscored the need to truly include all segments of society. The session co-moderator, Mr. Sauli Niinisto, President of the Republic of Finland, for instance, emphasized the importance of buy-in from citizens not just a way to accelerate the work on SDGs but also to hold governments accountable in upholding their commitments. Ms. Songwe also affirmed the importance of addressing gender and youth. “If we want to pick one SDG, we should work on the SDG that works on gender equality.” Although it is crucial to implement the SDGs through an integrated approach, gender equality is indeed inextricable from sustainable development, and equality must be at the center of policymaking.

#### **Leaders Dialogue 4: Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals**

The third event of the SDG Summit’s second day was entitled “Leaders Dialogue 4: Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals.” President of the Republic of Croatia Ms. Kolinda Grabar Kitarović and Prime Minister of Bangladesh Ms. Sheikh Hasina co-moderated the event. During the session, 5 member states and representatives from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Inter-Parliamentary Union, and Surabaya Municipal Government shared experiences on tailoring SDGs to local and national needs and realities. Participants included: Eswatini, Palau, Bhutan, Nauru, Samoa, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Inter-Parliamentary Union, and Indonesia.

The session’s co-moderator, Ms. Kolinda Grabar Kitarović, President of the Republic of Croatia called for a whole-society approach and emphasized the need to establish systemic collaboration between multiple levels of government. Bangladesh pointed out that local governments and municipalities play a critical role in managing and implementing the SDGs first hand, and that parliament is also critical for “initialising” the SDGs and enabling local authorities to do the most productive work. Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, President, Inter-Parliamentary Union stated that “if development priorities are not in the budget, then they are not priorities”. Samoa also affirmed the importance of reflecting the SDGs in national budgets, and noted the need for strengthened capacity to address disconnects between budgeting and planning processes, particularly for sector plans involving more than one lead ministry of SDGs. Countries such as Samoa, Eswatini, and Bangladesh noted that they have integrated the SDGs into national development plans, frameworks, and strategies. Panelists also mentioned the need for monitoring and evaluation

frameworks as a key tool in the implementation of SDGs. Nauru and Palau, both small island developing states (SIDS), mentioned that data collection still remains a challenge to assess progress on the work being done to accelerate the achievement of SDGs.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union highlighted the importance of having parliamentarians review legislation based on human rights commitments, and legislate laws that do not exclude vulnerable groups, women, and young people from democratic participation. “In all laws, there should be no exclusion” she stated. Bhutan supported coordination and coherence through their “Gross National Happiness” framework, which includes a Gross National Happiness Commission that reports monthly on progress, as well as a parliamentary committee on the SDGs. This has resulted in going carbon negative through maintaining 60% of the country as forest land, and investing in social protection including free health care and education, with teachers the among most highly paid professions in the country. Samoa emphasized that the commitment to leave no one behind can only be achieved by focusing on inclusion and “securing citizens’ right to development.” “The same effort is applied to our [SDG] implementation efforts, including the Paris Agreement and the human rights, disarmament and environmental conventions,” stated the Samoan representative. Croatia noted that they are introducing a “circular economy” that commits to “equal living conditions of the islands and mainland.” Eswatini also mentioned passing a new law to protect women from domestic violence as part of their goal to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls.

Bangladesh noted that they included local people in the localization process, to make sustainable development more responsive and relevant to local needs and aspirations. “By working with grassroots, we can bring big change”, the representative of Bangladesh stated. “[W]e can bring the benefits of of the SDGs to those that are most marginalized, at the bottom of the society and economy.” Eswatini also highlighted the importance of engaging local communities: they engaged in a consultative process with diverse stakeholders including youth, women, and people with disabilities to domesticate SDG targets, and include social protection for children, elderly, and people living with disabilities, as well as taking action toward food security and enacting laws to protect women and girls from domestic violence. Palau also reminded listeners that “greater solidarity with the smallest and most vulnerable is a must.”

## Leaders Dialogue 5: Partnerships for Sustainable Development

The fourth event of the SDG Summit's second day was entitled "Leaders Dialogue 5: Partnerships for Sustainable Development". The session was co-chaired by President of Ethiopia Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde and President of Guinea H.E. Mr. Alpha Conde. During the session, 8 member states and representatives from the International Chamber of Commerce, Africa Development Bank, International Trade Union Confederation discussed the impact that partnerships have had on the implementation and accelerations of the 2030 Agenda. Participants included: Seychelles, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Czech Republic, Sweden, Cabo Verde, Madagascar, International Chamber of Commerce, Africa Development Bank, and International Trade Union Confederation.

The discussion highlighted ongoing tensions and fundamental differences in opinion on the issues of partnerships for sustainable development. On one hand, International Trade Union Confederation Secretary General Ms. Sharan Burrow shed light on the structural obstacles and systems of power preventing realisation of the 2030 Agenda's vision. "The global economic model has failed working people and their families," she stated. "The world is three times richer than it was twenty years ago, but 70% of people are denied protection, families are living on the edge of despair, and 94% of the world's workforce is a hidden workforce for companies who rely on them for profit. The social contract is broken," she stated. "When corporate greed or authoritarian governments close democratic space denying rights, they all exploitation and oppression, and it fuels the age of anger and despair we are living in," she continued. "This is inequality by design, and the world people need a new social contract, which has the UN backing." Ms. Burrow called for "a new social contract" with human and labor rights at its core. "This is the partnership for Sustainable Development that we call for."

On the other hand, International Chamber of Commerce Secretary-General Mr. John W. H. Denton AO provided a very different vision. "How do we enable systems change to enable SDG delivery?" asked Mr. Denton. "We need to create an environment where we can create massive scale within business across the world... We compliment you on the decision to include us because you recognized the power of the private sector to enable the SDGs. Without us, we might just as well stop worrying and move on."

The session discussion made it clear that the international community is at a crossroads: take steps toward systems change for people and planet, or continue business as usual with small tweaks. The International Chamber of Commerce representative claimed that, "We are here for business unusual". However, sustainable development is not about sustainable businesses, or even corporate social responsibility. It is about a different kind of development: economic development that protects the environment and ensures social development including women's human rights.. As the Women's Major Group has previously noted in their 2019 position paper, corporations do their job when they pay their taxes and pay their workers fairly. This does not require corporate charity or private public partnerships. It requires development justice.

A few governments cautiously flagged issues of structural obstacles and power during discussion. President of Ethiopia and Co-moderator H.E. Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde noted that, “Focusing on systemic issues would bring significant results in achieving the SDGs by 2030.” The representative of Seychelles brought attention to “the blue economy roadmap” as a tool to guide and prioritize actions based on principles of good governance, economic efficiency, resilience, and social equity; they also noted that this approach facilitates a multi-sectoral framework with multiple partners, including youth and women, for building sustainable tourism that addresses economic, environmental and social considerations. The representative of Sweden brought attention to Sweden’s pioneering leadership in taking forward a feminist government: “Achieving the SDGs requires achieving gender equality. This requires SDG 5 but also incorporating a gender perspective everywhere.” The African Development Bank committed to doubling climate financing, noting that they offer finance action for women.

However, most governments were either silent on issues of corporate power or actively pursued public private partnerships as a key tool for implementation of the SDGs. For example, Georgia called for enhanced engagement of the private sector. Cabo Verde called for accessing external financing to complement national efforts. And Seychelles noted that partnerships are required, especially regarding the challenges of SIDs. This raises serious concerns regarding the international community’s ability to tackle structural obstacles to sustainable development, gender equality, and peace.

### **Leaders Dialogue 6: The 2020-2030 Vision**

The last leaders dialogue of the SDG Summit was entitled “Leaders Dialogue 6: The 2020-2030 Vision.” The session was co-moderated by Vice President of Indonesia H.E. Mr. Muhammad Jusuf Kalla, and Malta Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Promotion Hon. Carmelo Abela. During the session, 6 member states and representatives from UN Women and the World Blind Union discussed ways to accelerate implementation of the SDGs in the last decade of delivery. Participants included: Latvia, Malaysia, Andorra, Comoros, Hungary, Armenia, UN-Women, and World Blind Union.

The key takeaway from the session was the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda, with panelists urging member states to reflect on the possibilities that genuine commitment to the SDGs could produce for the future. Mr. Jose Viera, Chief Executive Officer, World Blind Union, summed this call by emphasizing that “the 2030 Agenda can create a planet for every person, including those most marginalized and left behind where we’re recognized as equal citizens with dignity, respect, and freedom.”

In line with this takeaway, the key highlight from the session was to focus on inclusion and to ensure that the 2030 agenda represents the true needs of the people. The session's co-moderator Mr. Carmelo Abela, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Promotion of Malta, for instance, underscored that inclusive multilateralism is key to the efforts to achieve the SDGs, and that people need to be at the center of that effort. In a similar manner, Mr. Jose Viera, Chief Executive Officer, World Blind Union, called world leaders to put human rights at the center of policy making and ensure participation of marginalized groups, with a reminder that "development is not sustainable if it's not for all, fair, and inclusive." Armenia reiterated this call by stating that their country policies focus on human capital, human dignity, and democracy, with a goal to strengthen human-centered values. In line with this statement, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, emphasized that countries must reduce global military spending and "invest in people and planet."

### **Plenary and Closing Segment**

The second day of the SDG Summit's plenary included remarks by 14 states. This included eleven individual remarks by: Morocco, Gambia, Slovakia, Cuba, Russia, Ecuador, Denmark, Djibouti, Zambia, Tunisia, and Nicaragua. It also included three remarks on behalf of groups. This included: Fiji, on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States; Vanuatu, on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum; and France, on behalf of the Group of 7. The common message delivered by the participating states was a call to urgent action to accelerate the 2030 Agenda. Drawing on the potential of SDGs to generate change, Denmark stated that "the SDGs do not present a utopia. They can be met."

As a common theme, the states called on accountability for the international community to deliver on their commitments. A few were bold enough to raise issues of justice. "[T]he prevailing international order continues to be unjust and exclusive," stated the representative of Cuba. "We need a new economic model," stated Nicaragua. Others highlighted good practices and opportunities for strengthened coordination, coherence, an accountability. "We need to redouble efforts to deal with cross-cutting issues, especially focusing on inequality between men and women," stated France (on behalf of the Group of 7). "It is incumbent upon the G7 that their own policies align with the SDGs." Vanuatu (on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum) called for the UN Secretary General to appoint a Special Advisor on Climate Change to promote rapid implementation of commitments, and to strengthen capacities to rapidly accelerate transformation, including access to carbon neutrality. Zambia highlighted a African SDG Center in Zambia launched in August 2019 aimed at facilitating SDGs attainment and building local capacities.

However, the disproportionate focus continued to be on calls for development aid and public private partnerships, which do not provide transformative alternatives to business as usual. Out of the 14 member states whose speeches mentioned the importance of universality in the

achievement of SDGs, Cuba was the only one that pointed at the damaging impact that wars and “unsustainable patterns of governance” have on the acceleration of the 2030 agenda, stating that “there is an urgent need to count the real political will of all states.” Djibouti raised the issue of services for refugees and asylum seekers. Tunisia noted their support for SDG16+ including gender equality, and shared about how they inscribed gender equality, the liberation of women, and women’s empowerment in their constitution and national legislation. However, Gender equality was mentioned by less than half of the participating speakers, with only 6 states providing thoughts and national developments on the topic. Among those, Fiji and Vanuatu focused on the continuing violence against women across the Pacific while France stated that member states need to “redouble efforts to deal with cross-cutting issues, especially focusing on inequality between men and women.” Tunisia, on the other hand, focused on women’s empowerment as the key pillar of sustainable development, indicating that the country has adopted national legislation to increase women’s political participation.

The second and final day ended with the official Closing Segment which hosted Spoken Word poet Ameer Brown and People Action for the SDGs, SDG Action Campaign and Young Leaders for the SDGs alongside the closing speakers Mr. Tijjani Muhammad Bande and Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations. Ameer Brown spoke eloquently about the instrumentalisation of people and planet and the need to include youth in sustainable development actions. The representative from People Action for the SDGs, SDG Action Campaign and Young Leaders for the SDGs called on listeners for greater accountability from governments and other stakeholders, stating, “The message is simple: we’re not here to settle for great promises any more; we demand action. We will play our part to mobilize young people. We will hold ourselves accountable and you can be sure we will hold you accountable.” Ms. Amina Mohammed reminded listeners, “the task ahead is clear: we can still achieve the SDGs, but a transformation of the society and economy will be required to do so”, in particular highlighting the need to reduce poverty and discrimination against women and girls, among others.

### **SDG Political Declaration**

A political declaration entitled “Gearing up for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development: political declaration of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit” was formally adopted during the Opening Session. Divided into three sections: Our Commitment, Our World Today, and Our Call to Accelerated Action, the political declaration focuses on reaffirming the vision and aim of Agenda 2030, stating that signing Heads of State and Government and high representatives are together “launching an ambitious and accelerated response to reach our common vision by 2030, and pledging to make the coming decade one of action and delivery.” The political declaration renewed states’ commitment to multilateralism, leaving no one behind, and “a vision of a world with access to inclusive and equitable quality education, universal health coverage and quality health care, food security and improved nutrition, safe drinking water and sanitation, affordable, reliable and sustainable energy and quality and resilient

infrastructure for all". The declaration recognises the particular challenges faced by vulnerable countries, including countries in conflict and post-conflict situations. It affirms that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is critical for progress of all goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, recognising that "if one half of humanity continues to be denied full human rights and opportunities" the achievement of sustainable development will not be possible.

The political declaration recognises climate change as "one of the greatest challenges of our time" and raises the alarm on its effects on countries, particularly developing and vulnerable countries, but it makes no substantive connection to conflict or increase in migration as a result of environmental degradation. There are multiple mentions of the important role of the private sector in resource mobilisation and strengthening an "enabling environment" for investment and international development cooperation. It submits concern on the slow progress being made in many goal areas, recognising that "Vulnerabilities are high and deprivations are becoming more entrenched. Assessments show that we are at risk of missing the poverty eradication target. Hunger is on the rise. Progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is too slow."

While the declaration commits to accelerating action, it was drafted before the July HLPF and therefore was restricted from effectively taking up July discussions on key 2030 goals -- including on peace (SDG16), climate (SDG11), and inequalities (SDG10). Due to support from member state allies, the declaration does address gender equality. However, it does not address key priorities continually raised by the feminist movement, including unpaid care work, sexual and reproductive health and rights, LGBTQI communities, disarmament, and women human rights defenders and peacebuilders.

### **SDG Acceleration Actions**

As part of preparations for the SDG Summit, the international community was invited to make "Acceleration Actions", or commitments to accelerate the 2030 Agenda in the next decade. Over 116 Acceleration Actions were registered by member states, UN entities, and other organizations by the SDG Summit to scale up action on the SDGs.

Earlier this year, over 80 organisations signed on to an Open Letter by WILPF and partners to the Group of Friends of 1325, urging member states to commit to accelerating actions on the SDGs that also advance the WPS agenda. ([Read the full letter here](#)).

Of the 116 actions, 24 commitments (21%) commit to actions that contribute to both gender equality (SDG 5) and peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16), which is a positive result for action based on the WPS Agenda principles. One third (38 actions or 33%) of actions were registered as contributing to gender equality (SDG 5) more broadly, and almost half (52 actions or 45%) were registered as contributing to peaceful and inclusive societies more broadly. In addition, approximately half of actions on SDG5 and SDG16 cross referenced the other goal, which is a

positive result for policy coherence across the goals (63% of SDG 5 actions cross-listed SDG16, and 46% of SDG 16 actions cross-listed SDG5).

Despite, this Sweden was the only member states who explicitly affirmed the Women, Peace and Security Agenda as part of its acceleration actions: Sweden committed to scale-up its Feminist Foreign Policy, including accelerating WPS agenda in line with the [open letter](#) by WILPF and partners.

As this suggests, some action is being taken, but more is needed. Strengthen coordination and coherence with existing [commitments](#) on Women, Peace and Security should be an urgent area for action.

### **Moving Forward**

As WILPF's coalition, the Women's Major group has [affirmed](#): a rights-based approach to the SDGs is not an option, but an obligation. Public private partnerships should not be advanced unless they are accountable through a legally binding corporate accountability mechanism. Social protection rather than austerity is required. Consistent ex-ante, and post gender, human rights, and environment impact assessments should be taken on all economic and other policies. Moving forward, the international community must increase their vision and take more risks to address systemic barriers and leave no one behind.