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High-level political forum on sustainable development

Convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council
7–16 July 2020

Draft ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the 2020 session of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum on sustainable development, convened under the auspices of the Council, submitted by the President of the Council, Mona Juul (Norway)

Ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the 2020 session of the Economic and Social Council and the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development, convened under the auspices of the Council, on the theme “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”

I. Introduction

We, the Ministers and high representatives, have adopted, during this challenging time that our world is facing, the present declaration at the high-level segment of the 2020 session of the Economic and Social Council and the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development.

1. As we commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, we reaffirm our commitment to international cooperation and multilateralism. We also reaffirm our belief in the importance of the United Nations and its purposes and principles as enshrined in its Charter. We recognize the central role of the United Nations system in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,¹ as well as catalysing and coordinating a global response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, based on unity, solidarity, multilateralism and international cooperation.

2. The unprecedented COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated our world’s vulnerabilities and inequalities within and among countries. This emphasizes the urgent need for a global renewed commitment to solidarity, across the multilateral system, nations, people and generations. We stress that accelerated progress towards implementing the 2030 Agenda should be our collective road map to respond and

¹ General Assembly resolution 70/1.



build back better; help prevent future pandemics; achieve a sustainable, resilient and prosperous future for all; and respect, protect and fulfil human rights.

3. As we enter the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, we reaffirm our commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda in its entirety. We also reaffirm the principles recognized in the 2030 Agenda, which is people-centred, transformative and universal in nature, and that its Goals and targets are integrated and indivisible, balancing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. We need an integrated approach that will leverage interlinkages and minimize trade-offs across Goals and targets, lead to sustainable and inclusive recovery, and accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the framework of the decade of action and delivery.

4. We reaffirm that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, and note with concern that, for the first time in decades, the trend of poverty reduction is being reversed.

5. We recognize that the poorest and the people in vulnerable situations are the most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. We will place a focus on those people in our policies and actions. We will undertake every effort to leave no one behind and to reach the furthest behind first. Those whose needs are reflected in the 2030 Agenda include all children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants. We also intend to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society.

6. We reaffirm that the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Sustainable Development Goals and targets and that responses to COVID-19 should be gender-responsive.

II. Assessment of the situation regarding the 2030 Agenda

7. The report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals² and the *Global Sustainable Development Report* state that the progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda continues to be too slow and uneven and that it has either stalled or been reversed in some areas. The number of people suffering from hunger is on the rise; climate change is occurring much faster than anticipated, as evidenced by, inter alia, the impacts on oceans and seas, the loss of vulnerable ecosystems and the retreat of mountain glaciers. Biodiversity loss, deforestation, water stress, as well as global pollution from chemicals and waste, remain global challenges, while desertification continues to increase; infrastructure building is lagging far behind the actual demands; and inequality continues to increase within and among countries.

8. We acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic reinforces pre-existing obstacles to realizing the Goals, structural inequalities, gaps and systemic challenges and risks. It threatens to halt or obliterate the progress that has been made since 2015. We recognize the efforts and measures proposed by the Secretary-General concerning the response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The effects of the pandemic have overwhelmed health systems globally, caused businesses and factories to shut down, pushed down commodity prices, investment and remittances, affected international human mobility, the tourism industry and related services, undermined

² E/2019/68.

the ability of local authorities to provide basic services, severely impacted the livelihoods of half of the global workforce, exacerbated unemployment, kept hundreds of millions of students out of schools, challenged the provision of humanitarian assistance and protection, and disrupted global value and supply chains, affecting the supply of products. The pandemic has disproportionately affected people of all ages with pre-existing medical conditions, and older persons, who are at a significantly higher risk of mortality, and showed a higher mortality rate in men affected by COVID-19 compared with women. It also poses risks of regression in gender equality and is expected to push tens of millions of people back into extreme poverty and hunger. We recognize the need for coordination and collaboration at all levels of governance to respond to the pandemic. The insufficient efforts to implement the Goals exacerbated the impact of the pandemic. We also acknowledge the multidimensional nature of the pandemic and its severe impact on all countries, especially developing countries and countries in special situations.

III. Actions for the way forward

9. We reaffirm our commitment to the actions in the political declaration adopted at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit held in September 2019³ and the preceding declarations of the high-level political forum. We emphasize that the decade of action should address the accelerated actions listed below, aimed at eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, everywhere, and achieving a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

10. We recognize the special challenges and needs facing the most vulnerable countries, in particular African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, as well as the specific challenges facing many middle-income countries and countries in conflict and post-conflict situations, in pursuing sustainable development. Taking into account the different levels of development and the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on developing countries, we will support them by taking urgent steps to help them to build back better and achieve sustainable development, including through increasing access to concessional finance, especially in the context of the global pandemic.

11. We invite the international community and all relevant stakeholders to cooperate and mobilize resources, including through financial and in-kind assistance, as well as direct aid to host countries and refugee populations, with a view to enhancing the capacity of and reducing the heavy burden borne by countries and communities hosting refugees, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the guiding principles of the humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations, as reflected in the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

12. We strongly believe that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development. We welcome, in this regard, the Secretary-General's appeal for an immediate global ceasefire. We will redouble our collective efforts to build peaceful, just, and inclusive societies through reducing inequalities within and among countries, enhancing our ability to prevent and resolve conflicts. We further commit to finding peaceful and just solutions to disputes and to respecting international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including the right to self-determination of peoples and the need to

³ General Assembly resolution 74/4, annex.

respect the territorial integrity and political independence of States. We also commit to respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights for all, ending all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, ensuring equal access to justice and achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. We will also upscale our efforts to build and strengthen more effective, accountable and transparent institutions, and ensure equal access to basic services and opportunities, with a special emphasis on people in vulnerable situations. We recognize that terrorism, organized crime, corruption, illicit financial flows, global health threats, humanitarian emergencies and forced displacement of people, threaten to reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades.

13. We are determined to invest and cooperate in prevention and resilience as essential components of disaster risk reduction, to increase preparedness and to build back better, in accordance with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.⁴ We will combine short-term actions with long-term disaster risk reduction strategies and policies, to prevent the creation of new risks, reduce existing risks, resist shocks and mitigate their consequences, including by investing in reducing hazard exposure and vulnerability, nature-based solutions, information and communication networks, early warning systems and evidence-based policymaking.

14. We will protect and advance human well-being by promoting investment in and ensuring equitable and universal access to quality and inclusive education at all levels, including through remote learning, as well as universal, quality and affordable health services, social protection, affordable and safe housing, safe drinking water and adequate sanitation, safe, sufficient and nutritious food, energy and information and communications technology. We will use all policy tools to mitigate the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We will relaunch sustainable and inclusive growth, reduce income inequalities and address the financing challenges of developing countries to achieve sustainable development. We will promote a sustainable and inclusive recovery of our economies, including through ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns, to protect the environment and create conditions for decent work for all, including for those in the informal economy, support and facilitate access to finance for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises and build their capacity, to help restore jobs and incomes.

15. We will ensure that emergency social and economic schemes integrate a gender perspective and the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. We recognize the multi-faceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls, who also face increased levels of violence and exploitation. We recommit to targeted and accelerated action to remove all legal, social and economic barriers to achieve gender equality, full, effective and meaningful participation in decision-making and the empowerment of all women and girls and their full and equal enjoyment of all human rights.

16. We will invest in strengthening national health and social protection systems, including to achieve universal health coverage, to help to ensure a sustainable recovery from COVID-19, as well as pandemic preparedness and the prevention and detection of, and response to, any future outbreaks, including through universal and effective application of the International Health Regulations and a reinforcement of the global health system. In the light of the current pandemic, and given their weak health systems, high levels of debt and limited fiscal space, we commit to supporting all developing countries that are the most affected by the pandemic, with greater emphasis on providing technical assistance, improving health facilities infrastructure and investing in quality health services and social protection systems. We underscore that equitable access, without any hindrance or form of

⁴ General Assembly resolution [69/283](#), annex II.

discrimination, to quality vaccines, medicines, treatments, medical equipment, new diagnostics and other health products for COVID-19 is a global priority and that their availability, accessibility, acceptability and affordability are fundamental to tackling the pandemic. We also recognize the role of extensive immunization against COVID-19 as a global public good.

17. We remain determined to end hunger and achieve food security and improved nutrition for all as a matter of priority and to end all forms of malnutrition, while ensuring sustainable and resilient food systems, promoting sustainable agriculture, including smallholder and family farming, that increases productivity and production, and preventing food loss and waste. Recognizing that COVID-19 has exacerbated food insecurity, and also recognizing that international trade is an engine for development, we will work to ensure the flow of vital medical supplies, food and agricultural products and inputs, and other goods and services across borders, and work to resolve disruptions to the global supply chains to support the health and well-being of all people. We reiterate our goal to realize a free, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent, predictable and stable trade and investment environment and to keep our markets open. We look forward to the 2021 Food Systems Summit to be convened by the Secretary-General.

18. We also reaffirm that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time. We express profound alarm that emissions of greenhouse gases continue to rise globally, and remain deeply concerned that all countries, particularly developing countries, are vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. We emphasize in this regard that mitigation of and adaptation to climate change represent an immediate and urgent priority. We reaffirm the need to immediately curb greenhouse gas emissions. We also stress the importance of engaging further efforts and mobilizing means of implementation for climate change mitigation and adaptation, including strengthening resilience, taking into account the specific needs and special circumstances of developing countries, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. We recognize the synergies between the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.⁵

19. We recommit to protecting wildlife and other living species and to reversing the trends in environmental degradation through the restoration of ecosystems, halting biodiversity loss and deforestation, integrating the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, as well as the fair and equitable benefit-sharing of the use of genetic resources, into relevant national decision-making, ending the illegal and unsustainable trade and consumption of wildlife, forest restoration, combating desertification and achieving land degradation neutrality, conserving and sustainably using oceans, seas and marine resources, and promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns. We also recommit to improving resource efficiency and significantly reducing pollution and waste, including discharge of plastic litter into the oceans, and achieving a world in which humanity lives in harmony with nature. In that regard, we emphasize that biodiversity, climate and health must be addressed holistically, including through, inter alia, investing in scaling up ecosystem-based approaches, nature-based solutions, sustainable infrastructure and other possible strategies, as appropriate, to build back better and greener. We will promote a coherent approach for addressing biodiversity loss, climate change and land and ecosystem degradation, including between the secretariats of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,⁶ the Convention on Biological Diversity⁷ and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in

⁵ See [FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1](#), decision 1/CP.21, annex.

⁶ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1771, No. 30822.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 1760, No. 30619.

Africa.⁸ We also recall, in this context, the relevant initiative of the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

20. We reaffirm our commitment to universal access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. We commit to accelerating the deployment of sustainable energy technologies, including through promoting access and investment in clean and advanced energy technologies and energy infrastructure, as appropriate. We recognize that accelerating the transition to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, and achieving universal access by 2030, could facilitate sustainable recovery from COVID-19, and long-term resilience, and advance the interconnected Sustainable Development Goals. We support solutions that are in line with people's needs and that support local economic activities. It is also critical that we scale up capacity-building, research and development, including by sharing experiences and data and promoting innovation and investments in energy efficiency across all sectors of the economy, and that we support sustainable energy deployment, particularly in developing countries.

21. We emphasize that increasing investment in infrastructure will drive growth and help to achieve the Goals, and that filling the gap in infrastructure financing will require public and private financing as well as technologies, know-how and operational efficiencies. We reaffirm our commitment to develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transboundary infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all.

22. We will continue to strengthen the science-policy interface through evidence-based policymaking, support for research and development, harnessing science, technology and innovation, and leveraging technologies to promote inclusive digital economy and build resilience across sectors. In this regard, we thank the Secretary-General for launching the Road Map for Digital Cooperation. We commit to enhancing and promoting capacity-building, infrastructure, connectivity and technical assistance initiatives as well as innovation and technologies towards advancing the Goals and targets, with a special focus on developing countries, and commit to strengthening cooperation to close the digital divide within and among countries.

23. We pledge to increase our level of ambition to mobilize and effectively use all available means of implementation, to fully implement the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development⁹ and the agreed conclusions and recommendations of the Economic and Social Council forums on financing for development follow-up. We are deeply concerned about the impact of high debt levels on countries' ability to withstand the impact of the COVID-19 shock and to invest in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We commit to addressing the needs of the developing countries, especially those highly indebted and most vulnerable, and invite the international community and relevant stakeholders, including private and commercial creditors, to urgently and properly address those needs, and engage efforts towards coordinated international debt relief efforts for countries experiencing solvency problems, in close cooperation with international financial institutions. In this regard, we welcome the Group of 20 debt service suspension initiative.

24. We recognize that the pandemic is adding more hardships in the implementation of the Goals. We will continue strengthening the means of implementation and acknowledge that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires a strong commitment to partnership at all levels between Governments, the

⁸ Ibid., vol. 1954, No. 33480.

⁹ General Assembly resolution [69/313](#), annex.

private sector, civil society and all other relevant stakeholders. Therefore, we recognize the importance of the various contributions of all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector. Strengthening multilateralism, international cooperation and global partnership is more important than ever. We will continue to enhance South-South and triangular cooperation, reaffirming that South-South cooperation is a complement to but not a substitute for North-South cooperation.

25. We commit to maintaining the integrity of the 2030 Agenda by raising the ambition and ensuring continuous action on the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals with a 2020 timeline, by redoubling our efforts to achieve these targets in an accelerated time frame, reflecting the urgency conveyed in the Agenda, and requesting the relevant intergovernmental forums and bodies to review and, as needed, adjust their frameworks so as to allow to update targets to reflect a suitable level of ambition for 2030. The 2021 high-level political forum will review progress in this regard.

26. We commit to strengthening our national statistical capacities to address the gaps in data on the 2030 Agenda in order to allow countries to provide high-quality, timely, reliable, disaggregated data and statistics and to fully integrate the Goals and targets in our monitoring and reporting systems and sharing of best practices in this regard. We encourage international cooperation, supporting statistical capacity-building in developing countries, in particular the most vulnerable countries, which face the greatest challenges in producing, collecting, analysing and using high-quality, timely and reliable data and statistics.

27. We urge the United Nations to further capitalize on the key findings and evidence extracted from the voluntary national reviews and encourage peer learning. We encourage countries to share locally driven development approaches and pathways to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We also recognize the contribution of the regional reviews, as well as the contribution of the United Nations regional commissions, the regional forums on sustainable development, major groups and all relevant stakeholders.

28. We commit to involving and empowering local authorities to ensure local ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular by citizens, and to best translate national development priorities into local realities.

29. Finally, we will promote public engagement and innovative partnerships through a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, regional and local mobilization and actions, and involvement of communities, people, civil society, academia and the private sector. We will continue to ensure the meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders in the high-level political forum. We also acknowledge the role of the volunteers in the implementation of the Goals. We will invest more in human capital to empower children and youth as critical agents of change and support their meaningful participation in realizing the vision of the 2030 Agenda.