

Check against delivery

## **Human Rights Council**

**Intersessional meetings for dialogue and cooperation on human rights and the  
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.**



**Oral statement by**

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Thank you for this privilege of joining you in this critical second intersessional meeting for dialogue and cooperation on human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

On behalf of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, we congratulate **H.E. Zamorano, Permanent Representative of Chile** on his appointment as Chair of this **meeting**. And we thank the distinguished panellists who have joined us actually and virtually including of course, **the President of the Human Rights Council**.

Excellencies,

You know far better than I, that the world's progress report on the first five years of delivery of the SDGs does not make for happy reading. Precisely no country is yet on track to achieve those goals by 2030.

I recall, when young – way back, deep into last century – how it felt to take home a report card that did not meet expectations. I could blame the teacher, blame the test or perhaps, less often, take credit for my poor efforts.

The 2030 Agenda is a consensus document, crafted and agreed by those whom it now appraises. Is the test just too tough or is it our effort that is called into question?

The SDGs are attainable. And the 2030 Agenda provides a detailed, practical roadmap to a destination we cannot afford to miss. The 2030 Agenda is the game changer – if we care to make it so.

However, deadly conflicts impede efforts to tackle a climate in crisis. Impunity entrenches corruption which wastes precious public investments. Discrimination serves persistent inequalities, forcing millions to be left behind. The suppression of public freedoms and civic space undermines democratic governance making fairness, justice and accountability all the more elusive. The interdependence of success within and across goals is the same ecology too for their failure. Peace and prosperity for people and planet are indivisible; divided they all fall – we will fail them all.

It is why this year's SDG Summit did not abandon the goals but demanded the opposite - ***accelerated action for implementation of the SDGs is essential***.

**And it is human rights as accelerators** that is the basis for our gathering here today.

The SDGs are imbued with rights - the acknowledgement that development without people as its core is merely economy; that development lining the pockets of the wealthy and leaving further behind those who have the least is not development but a corruption, at least morally, if not corruption in law; that development which destroys traditional culture, language, land and human heritage is not development but wilful destruction.

Defining under what terms development is neither corruption, destruction nor exclusion has many metrics and many thresholds – but in each, human rights standards and norms are key.

This second intersessional meeting marks thus a key milestone on our ambitious journey. With but a decade to go, energy, determination, focus on the part that rights can play is just essential – essential for just outcomes.

Excellencies

The modern rights regime was not born in prosperity. Forged from the deepest horror generated when the State turns against its own people, born at a time of infrastructure's decimation, in the midst of the worst of hatefulness. It gave us rights for tough times and prosperous.

For the decade ahead, the SDGs should be the UDHR's "operational plan" for delivery of all human rights for all people in all places - inclusively and universally. After all it is the international community's compact, to "leave no one behind" – a promise to dismantle inequality, to tear down discrimination, to disassemble the walls that divide and separate; to lower the fist – to reach out instead the hand of opportunity to those otherwise denied it.

But for that promise to be met, the accelerators of delivery of the SDGs must become the focus here too. The human rights system must step up engagement:

**To accelerate, we must help innovate:** The recommendations of the UN human rights system (including of the UPR) must be better positioned as leverage points for rights-full delivery at country, regional and international levels.

The reports prepared for and by the human rights mechanisms carry a wealth of information and data that can help - help identify groups already behind and those most at risk of being left even further behind. Your resolutions, the advice your experts provide, the recommendations you make - a more strategic positioning of these outputs of the human rights system can even help reduce reporting burdens by helping States meet the imperatives of accountability for both the 2030 Agenda implementation and human rights commitments.

**To accelerate we must help better integrate:** For example, this Council and its mechanisms can and must pursue with greater focus a deep and visionary partnership with global efforts for climate action. The human implications of the projected levels of climate change are catastrophic. The economies of all nations; the civil, political, social and cultural development of every State; and the rights of all people – and future generations – hang in the balance of Governments' decisions over the coming decade – as is being said just a few hundred miles away at a far larger gathering than ours today. The human rights system's experience of norms and standards, negotiations and reporting too offer assets and capabilities that our counterparts meeting in Madrid desperately need.

**To accelerate we must also help generate** not only far more adequate and well directed financing for development but also a bold and courageous human rights paradigm for "economic transformation" – to one that is more equitable and more sustainable. As the Secretary-General has said, 'it is a sad fact of our world today that one's chances of leading a life free of want and in full human dignity still depend more on the circumstances of one's birth than one's innate capacities.'

So, we must strengthen our work too to enable the state's institutions including the judiciary to be more effective, in support of the accountable and transparent governance and policy coherence that enables the economic transformation that is the prerequisite to sustainable development.

**To accelerate we must disaggregate as we evaluate:** Inclusive development, like effective climate adaptation measures, will be those that empower women; indigenous peoples; and people living in the places most exposed to the worst consequences and yet, in bitter irony, have contributed the least. We must monitor therefore not only how national populations fare compared to their previous status, but also whether the power relations within those populations are being transformed. How much more autonomy are women and girls for example enjoying to make their own decisions about their bodies and their lives? How have men and boys changed their perception of and behaviours towards women and girls?

The principle of leaving no one behind (LNOB) demands disaggregation of data to identify progress for the excluded or discriminated against. Under the High Commissioner's leadership, OHCHR is stepping up work in this critical area and is piloting new support to UN Country Teams as they work to support member states' implementation of the commitment to leave no one behind.

**To accelerate we must ensure they must participate:** A question critical that is critical to the success of the indivisible and universal sustainable development agenda is the participation of rights-holders in its implementation. People after all are not just development's ends; they are its key means.

At this time, people across the world are already participating but as their public protests convey, in so many settings, they are yet to be incorporated. They are on the streets protesting inequalities, denouncing the narrowing of democratic space, demanding their right to development. But in many places they are not as yet relating to the rooms of power in ways that means they do fully participate.

To accelerate we must elevate people from protestors to partners, not merely denigrate them as problems to be contained. And this demands too a focus on more than the state alone – important as its duties are. Non-state actors - private, traditional and civil society actors - are critical for the SDGs.

In particular we must protect and enhance the role of civil society for it is there that participation including as human rights defenders must flourish, for the interests of people as citizens, not just consumers; for the sake of communities, not just markets; in the interests of sustainable dignity not mere containment of public unrest.

Nowhere is this clearer than in respect of young people. Our investments in adolescents and youth, now and throughout their life course, will define the SDGs trajectories for years to come.

Excellencies,

The SDGs as with the right to development is a promise to all people; a global promise to combat inequality among people, a global effort to lift people out of poverty, persecution and out of powerlessness; a global commitment to a prosperity for people that is sustainable for our planet -

as a place of human habitat, human heritage and human coexistence with earth's rich but today threatened biodiversity.

That is the heartbeat of the SDGs, and it is crucial that in their delivery of the SDGs, member states approach the person, who is at the Agenda's centre, as always and without exception, a rights-holders.

What this Council and its mechanism knows well is that if in implementation of the 2030 Agenda we accelerate our efforts here and elsewhere to position rights at these intersections between peace, prosperity, and planet – we will have placed people - their interests, their inclusion, their initiative - at its heart. And that would then be truly transformative. Thank you.

[1,500 words or 10 minutes]