



## **Open Letter from the High Commissioner to the Prime Minister and Finance Minister of Japan and to Ministers of Finance of G20 member countries**

### Quality Infrastructure Investment

Excellencies,

As the G20 Presidency passes from Argentina to Japan, we have an historic opportunity to strengthen global commitments towards quality infrastructure for all. This opportunity cannot be missed. Future generations, and the future of this planet, depend upon the infrastructure choices that we make and implement today.

Many important initiatives have been launched by States, international regional organizations and development finance institutions to promote sustainable infrastructure. In 2015 at Antalya, the G20 expressed its commitment to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the goal of quality infrastructure. The need for quality infrastructure was highlighted in the 2016 Hangzhou Communiqué, including addressing social and environmental impacts.

However, our current infrastructure investment path is anything but sustainable. Large transport, energy, water and other projects frequently displace large population groups without adequate (or any) consultation or compensation. Environmental and human rights defenders, particularly women, are facing ever greater threats, intimidation and reprisals. Labor rights violations are commonplace and the accessibility and affordability of services are often overlooked. Poor project management can lead to social conflict, delays, cost overruns and underused or disused infrastructure.

At the macro-level, poor design choices are creating environmental damage, locking in high carbon emissions, and exacerbating economic and social inequalities. Financing plans, and the financialization of infrastructure, may distort the public purposes of major infrastructure assets and create unsustainable debt burdens. People and parliaments are not being adequately consulted, and there is a gulf between investment plans and States' human rights and environmental commitments.

For these reasons, the subject of “quality infrastructure investment” under the Japanese G20 Presidency could not be more timely. And this is the reason why my Office, together with the Heinrich Boell Foundation, are releasing a new report: “The Other Infrastructure Gap: Sustainability”<sup>1</sup>, which shows how the human rights and environmental dimensions of sustainability are indispensable for quality infrastructure.

Our report draws from policy analysis as well as practical experience in implementing infrastructure projects. Our central message is that the right thing to do is also the smart thing to do, for long-term investment value and the future of the planet.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/InfrastructureGapSummary.pdf>

Civil society space is closing rapidly in many parts of the world. Early attention to human rights risks in infrastructure projects can save and improve countless human lives, while at the same time minimising social conflict and resulting delays and overruns, improving project decision-making, design and benefits, and facilitating the social license to operate.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda asks that our efforts to meet the SDGs be consistent with States' existing international legal obligations. This includes human rights and environmental law within an integrated package, recognizing – among other things – that environmental defenders are human rights defenders and that climate change is the most critical human rights challenge of our time. Our report attempts to show how respecting and implementing these important bodies of law can strengthen policy coherence and help achieve more equitable, transparent infrastructure contracts and more just and sustainable financing arrangements.

Earlier this month, on 10 December, the world celebrated the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the symbol of our common humanity, dignity and resilience. On 9 December, we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

There can be no important task the G20 could undertake on these momentous anniversaries than to commit to an infrastructure investment framework that respects individuals' and communities human rights: a framework that is not only economically efficient and resilient, but safe, socially and environmentally sustainable, and aimed explicitly at achieving global emissions reduction targets.

I hope that the analysis and recommendations in our report will help the government of Japan and G20 members to achieve these important goals.

I would also strongly urge the government of Japan and G20 members to consult fully with all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, in relation to the G20's programme of work, to ensure that all relevant perspectives are reflected and that the outcomes themselves will be sustainable.

Excellencies, please accept the assurances of my highest consideration, and the commitment of my Office towards the goal of sustainable, quality infrastructure for all.



Michelle Bachelet  
High Commissioner for Human Rights

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