



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
12 August 2023

Original: English

High-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council

10–19 July 2023

Summary by the President of the Economic and Social Council of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Council at its 2023 session

I. Introduction

1. The high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council met from 10 to 19 July 2023 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. It included a three-day ministerial segment, from 17 to 19 July. The 2023 forum was the first to be held in a fully in-person format since 2019 and the onset of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.
2. The forum examined progress in the context of the theme “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”. Participants discussed effective and inclusive recovery measures for addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Sustainable Development Goals and explored actionable policy guidance for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
3. Without prejudice to the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Goals, the forum conducted an in-depth review of the following five: ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (Goal 6); ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all (Goal 7); building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation (Goal 9); making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (Goal 11); and strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (Goal 17).
4. A total of 38 countries presented voluntary national reviews, of which 1 was presenting for the first time, 36 for the second time, and 1 for the third time. The European Union also presented its first voluntary review. The annex to the present report contains for the list of countries and groups that presented their reviews.



5. An in-person general debate was held from 17 to 20 July, during the high-level segment of the Council, which included the three-day ministerial meeting of the forum. The debate was focused on the theme “Building momentum towards the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit: transformation for accelerating implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals”. It provided an opportunity for ministers and high-level representatives of participating States, as well as representatives of intergovernmental organizations, entities of the United Nations system, major groups and other stakeholders, to exchange experiences, lessons learned, policy guidance, transformative actions and initiatives for the Sustainable Development Goals Summit to be held in September 2023.

6. In his special edition report entitled “Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: towards a rescue plan for people and planet” ([A/78/80-E/2023/64](#)), prepared in advance of the session, the Secretary-General emphasized that the defining principle and promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind was in peril. Furthermore, he noted that progress towards many of the Goals was moderately or severely off track and put forward five, major recommendations to rescue the Goals and accelerate their implementation between 2023 and 2030, for the consideration of States in advance of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit.

7. The 2023 forum constitutes the conclusion of the forum’s second four-year review cycle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The outcome of the forum convened under the auspices of the Council in July will serve to inform the forum convened under the auspices of the General Assembly, to be held in September 2023, during which Heads of State and Government will gather at United Nations Headquarters to conduct a midpoint review of progress towards implementing the 2030 Agenda and commit to specific actions for ensuring accelerated progress in the second half of the delivery period.

8. More than 120 representatives of Governments, including ministers, vice-ministers and one prime minister, participated in the forum, along with heads of entity of organizations and bodies of the United Nations system and other organizations, and more than 800 representatives of major groups and other stakeholders from all regions. The panels of all sessions of the high-level political forum included youth representatives as speakers. There were also 12 high-level special events, 204 side events (141 in-person and 63 virtual), 16 voluntary national review labs and 19 exhibitions.

II. Key messages from the general debate

9. Key messages from the general debate on the theme “Building momentum towards the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit: transformation for accelerating implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals” are set out below:

(a) Countries have been severely affected by multiple interlocking crises that have further amplified pressing challenges, including those relating to poverty, food insecurity, inflation, debt and energy. Countries have fallen further behind in progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the face of those recent challenges. Collective efforts therefore need to be strengthened to implement the 2030 Agenda;

(b) Despite the setbacks in achieving them, the Goals remain essential. Scientific analysis demonstrates that the Goals are still achievable if countries collaborate efficiently. The 2030 Agenda is recognized as the common road map for sustainable development;

(c) The Sustainable Development Goals Summit, to be held in September 2023, will serve as a unique opportunity to reaffirm the commitment to the 2030 Agenda and take specific actions to rescue and achieve the Goals;

(d) All the Goals are equally important and the achievement of each faces challenges. The current situation regarding food security (Goal 2) and access to clean water and sanitation (Goal 6) is particularly critical. For all the Goals, science, technology and innovation play a crucial role in overcoming challenges and accelerating progress;

(e) The commitment to leave no one behind must be reaffirmed, including through actions supporting gender equality and addressing the challenges faced by children and young people;

(f) Climate action, as well as the urgent need to tackle biodiversity loss and environmental degradation, are key priorities. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to renewable energies in a just and equitable manner are of the utmost importance;

(g) There is a need for greater support for countries in special situations. The distinctive challenges faced by the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States should be recognized, while the special challenges faced by middle-income countries should also be kept in mind;

(h) Access to financing is a key challenge to achieving sustainable development. Developing countries face significant obstacles owing to debt distress, high interest rates and constrained fiscal space, with limited affordable financing options. Many countries called for more concessional finance, reforms of the international financial architecture and innovative financing solutions, including debt relief for climate action swaps;

(i) Multi-stakeholder partnerships and global coordination, including with civil society, the private sector and local governments, are critical for implementing the 2030 Agenda. Such partnerships must be strengthened through a spirit of trust and good faith;

(j) Peace and security are prerequisites for sustainable development; there is no sustainable development without peace, and no peace without sustainable development.

III. Additional key messages from the high-level political forum

10. Additional key messages are set out below:

(a) Halfway to 2030, there is shared concern that the world is off track from fulfilling the 2030 Agenda. The term “polycrisis” refers to the interlinked nature of the current global challenges and indicates that global responses must also be interlinked;

(b) The time has come for action. There is an urgent need for effective, accelerated, transformative action at all levels to achieve the Goals and ensure that no one is left behind. Innovative policies and systemic changes are needed to support the achievement of the Goals, counter current global trends and promote multi-stakeholder collaboration;

(c) The Sustainable Development Goals Summit will provide an important opportunity for augmenting ambition, political will and broader social coalitions, grounded in robust scientific knowledge, to catalyse and lock in the momentum for

change, maximizing the benefits and cushioning the impact of the costs of the transformations that are necessary for achieving the 2030 Agenda;

(d) Multilateralism and international cooperation are imperative for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Global solidarity is crucial for sustainable development;

(e) The world is falling radically short in its funding of the Goals. Massive mobilization of funding is needed, including from private sources. Many countries, in particular in Africa, are allocating more resources for debt service than for public services. The United Nations is the most inclusive and democratic multilateral space for discussing issues of financing for development, including the reform of the international financial architecture;

(f) At the national level, inclusive whole-of-society approaches and the mobilization of partnerships, including public-private partnerships, are key drivers for pushing forward advancements and rolling out the benefits of achievements to all;

(g) Vulnerable populations must be seen as key stakeholders and be included in the decisions and actions for Goal implementation. The voices of women, girls and young people must also be amplified and acted upon in order to achieve all 17 Goals;

(h) Clean water and sanitation for all are essential to life and to achieving the Goals. Water and waste management systems need to be improved by using available data and scientific evidence. Global actions and momentum should continue following the success of the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028, held in New York in March 2023;

(i) Clean and affordable energy is an essential means for getting back on track to achieving the Goals and net zero emissions by 2050. Just, inclusive and equitable energy transitions must be urgently accelerated worldwide;

(j) Industry, innovation and infrastructure are crucial for advancing economic growth and sustainable development. Mobilizing public-private partnerships and whole-of-society approaches is a key driver in promoting investments in sustainable infrastructure and industrialization;

(k) In order to accelerate progress towards achieving sustainable cities and communities, it is important to prioritize affordable housing and sustainable transportation, leverage technology for urban development and build synergies around proven successful initiatives. Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities converges with Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation, Goal 7 on affordable and clean energy and Goal 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure;

(l) Enabling environments for science, technology and innovation that also bridge the digital divide need to be prioritized and will require enhanced international knowledge exchange and collaboration for capacity-building. The active participation in science, technology and innovation of young people, women and the most vulnerable populations is crucial for sustainable development. It was proposed that a “Young people in science, technology and innovation day” be held during the next multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals;

(m) Local action is key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals to leave no one behind. Local leaders and actors need to be empowered and resourced to localize the Goals and help to deliver the 2030 Agenda;

(n) Specific actions are needed to address the resource mobilization challenges faced by countries in special situations. Small island developing States face unique challenges. The least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and many African countries are at risk of being left behind. Efforts should include a focus on recovery and building resilience;

(o) Middle-income countries faced challenges and development gaps not captured by income-based indicators. Indicators that go beyond gross domestic product (GDP) are therefore essential in order to measure sustainable development holistically, guide policy decisions, facilitate international cooperation and ensure that no one is left behind;

(p) Data are essential for progress on the Goals to be achieved. Many countries struggle, however, to produce data relevant to the Goals and significant investment is therefore needed in relation to data gathering, data governance and the analytical capacity to ensure that high-quality, timely and reliable data are available to drive transformational change;

(q) Civil society partnerships are a critical part of ensuring that the progress towards achieving the Goals gets back on track, and the engagement of civil society groups should be ensured. Partnerships at the national and international levels are crucial;

(r) The Vice-President (Indonesia) of the Council shared the annex of transformative policies and initiative, as an innovative outcome of the coordination segment of the 2023 session of the Council that could inspire efforts at all levels to advance implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

IV. Overcoming the crises, driving transformation for the Goals and leaving no one behind

11. There was strong agreement among participants that the lack of progress towards the Goals required renewed commitments and transformative action. Participants voiced concerns about the number of people expected to be living in extreme poverty in 2030, the rise in food insecurity and the increase in climate-related disasters and child mortality. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic had slowed development and increased gaps between developed and developing countries. Conflicts and wars had led to the displacement of millions of people, and price volatility and the disruption of supply chains threatened the recovery of the world economy. Groups in vulnerable situations, such as children, Indigenous Peoples, women and girls and older persons were more intensely affected by such crises.

12. Panellists presented key actions needed to address the widening Goals financing gap, geopolitical conflicts and climate change, and to promote collective action to address transboundary challenges. International aid relating to agriculture, improved water management and efficient use of fertilizers was identified as a key measure for promoting food security. Risk-informed decision-making and increased investments in prevention and resilience-building were crucial, as were trustworthy social institutions and effective legal frameworks that promoted transparency and accountability. Many countries struggled to produce data relevant to the Goals, and more investment was therefore needed in relation to data gathering, data governance and analytical capacity to ensure that high-quality, timely and reliable data were available. Participants also emphasized the need to overcome the silo approach and to turn crises into development opportunities.

13. Participants noted that innovative and sustained policies were needed to address such challenges, including the reform of the international financial architecture, the promotion of multi-stakeholder collaboration, and targeted investments in health care and education. States were called upon to ramp up financing flows by at least \$500 billion by 2025, and to adapt the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. Participants also emphasized the need to promote best practices, respect for human rights, local partnerships and sustainable finance, and to focus on the implementation of the Goals by providing specific commitments and time frames.

V. Review of progress on Goals 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17

Goal 6: clean water and sanitation

14. Participants agreed that water and sanitation must become a top global political priority, recognized as both a global common good and a fundamental right. Due to the centrality of water as a source of life and the increased risks of inaction in the context of Goal 6, which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable, a paradigm shift in water management and increased, concerted action, including regular stock-taking, were pivotal. The need for political will and effective governance for collective water action and global commitment could not be overemphasized.

15. There was an increasingly urgent need to mitigate risks associated with water and sanitation and to develop early warning systems, in particular for countries in special situations and in Africa. Leaving no one behind and addressing the needs of women, children and other vulnerable groups were of pivotal concern, including the provision of safe and affordable menstrual health management. It was noted that local authorities must be engaged in decision-making in an inclusive manner and be empowered to act, in particular in rural areas and among Indigenous populations. Adequate financing was crucial, including innovative financing and the effective, accountable use of tariffs, taxes and both macro- and microloan tools. In addition, there was a need for a shift in mindset to more pragmatic, scalable and bankable solutions, in particular in recognizing the need for data-centric, evidence-based approaches and scientific validation. Coupled with data and knowledge-sharing, such a shift in mindset would help to extend the technical and financial viability of water policies, and lead to outcomes with more impact and longer-term sustainability.

16. The multi-dimensional, transboundary and interdisciplinary context of water required policy coherence and more effective, outcome-based cooperation among countries, stakeholder groups and institutions at all levels. The appointment of a United Nations special envoy on water, the adoption of a United Nations system-wide strategy and regular global dialogues on water would be strongly welcomed by countries. Global actions and momentum should continue following the success of the United Nations 2023 Water Conference.

Goal 7: affordable and clean energy

17. Participants highlighted the urgent need to intensify efforts to ensure universal access to clean and affordable energy and called for action to deliver on the global road map for accelerated action on Goal 7. Affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy underpinned the ability to achieve both the other Goals and net zero emissions by 2050. Ensuring universal access to clean and affordable electricity must be an urgent political priority at all levels, in particular for the least developed countries and sub-Saharan Africa.

18. Just, inclusive and equitable energy transitions must be urgently accelerated worldwide. Energy action must also ensure just and equitable outcomes as well as fulfil its key role in efforts to achieve net zero emissions. Without deep decarbonization of the energy sector, achieving net zero by 2050 would quickly fall out of reach. Many participants expressed support for strengthening public policy frameworks to support innovation, research and development and capacity-building relating to skills and talents, and to integrate climate and human rights considerations. Participants also called for decisive global action towards addressing the issue of clean cooking, which was an area that had seen only minimal progress in recent years and disproportionately affected women and children.

19. Participants noted the critical importance of reversing the trend of decline in international public financial flows in support of clean energy in developing countries and promoting technology transfers. Strengthening partnerships, including through energy compacts, could increase financing while also empowering local communities, including young people, women and Indigenous Peoples. It was suggested that a platform for regular intergovernmental dialogue on energy at the United Nations could contribute significantly to strengthening international cooperation in that regard.

Goal 9: industry, innovation and infrastructure

20. Advances made towards achieving Goal 9 also supported essential systems, such as water, sanitation and transportation, and were pivotal to boosting the overall progress on key Sustainable Development Goal transitions, such as clean energy, health, education, digital transformation and climate action. Innovation, supported by science and technology, was an engine of growth that drove transformation and allowed countries to develop their economies, provide employment and expand their range of products and services. Countries needed to adopt policies, strategies and regulations that promoted inclusive and just transitions towards green and digital economies and reduced the digital divide, including by investing in communications infrastructure, increasing digital literacy, and addressing cultural and religious barriers to using digital technologies. Policymakers should also promote legal frameworks that supported the responsible and ethical use of artificial intelligence and prepare their workforces for a future driven by artificial intelligence.

21. Building partnerships, including by mobilizing public-private partnerships, was critical to promoting investments in sustainable infrastructure and industrialization. Open and transparent institutions supported by good governance would provide an enabling environment for developing countries to attract and manage such investments. There was a need for a larger pipeline of bankable projects, as well as for transparent project appraisals, financing and competitive procurement in order to attract private sector investments. Equitable and consistent sharing of benefits was needed between innovators for the public good and private corporations that profited from taking derivative products to market. A whole-of-society approach, with active participation in decision-making, was pivotal for achieving Goal 9 and should include consideration of the infrastructure needs specific to young people.

22. International cooperation and a rules-based multilateral system that promoted justice and transparency played a key role in facilitating the sharing of knowledge and technology, building the foresight capacities of countries in order to anticipate sectors that would grow in the future and providing financial and technical assistance and capacity-building. Equitable trade agreements that created open environments for investment and entrepreneurship, in particular those that fostered and supported micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, were key to ensuring inclusive, sustainable growth and innovation.

Goal 11: sustainable cities and communities

23. In the light of the accelerating urbanization taking place in developing countries and the fact that there were currently approximately 4 billion urban dwellers around the world, achieving Goal 11 would have a far-reaching impact and was critical to the achievement of the Goals as a whole. Recent crises had negatively affected progress towards Goal 11, however, posing the risk of an additional 2 billion people living in slums within 30 years if strengthened action were not taken. As only 51.6 per cent of urban dwellers globally had easy access to public transportation, improving such access was critical for connecting urban dwellers to economic opportunities.

24. Participants highlighted the experiences of local governments in urban crisis response and the need to strengthen multistakeholder partnerships. They noted that the implementation of Goal 11 should begin at the local level and be based on inclusion, sustainability and affordable housing. Key stakeholders, including young people, called for “rethinking” cities, with a focus on affordable housing, sustainable transportation systems, availability of green spaces and accessibility for all.

25. Increasing collaboration between cities, South-South cooperation, and the sharing of technology and best practices were highlighted as key steps to achieving Goal 11, along with harnessing the power of technology in designing evidence-based policies and initiatives for sustainable urban development. Participants noted efforts to digitalize climate governance for cities and provide tools for measuring the impacts of urban development initiatives in relation to, for example, reducing urban climate emissions and increasing resilience.

Goal 17: partnerships for the Goals

Financing the crisis response and investing in the Sustainable Development Goals

26. Participants drew attention to the fact that, owing to the debt crisis, many countries were allocating an increasingly larger share of their fiscal income to debt service at the expense of the Goals and public services. In addition, the ongoing war in Ukraine was shifting public spending priorities in some countries to the military and fossil fuel industries.

27. Participants called for States to establish a legal framework to prevent the sovereign debt crisis, giving priority to debt cancellation and a new approach to debt sustainability. The public sector alone could not finance climate adaptation and the Goals; massive private capital mobilization and a fundamental reconsideration of the global financial architecture, including measures against corruption and financial crimes, were needed. Blended finance should be leveraged at scale with replicability and speed as a mechanism to crowd in the private sector, and countries should reconsider the use of special drawing rights.

Science, technology and innovation: triggering transformation and sustaining a science-driven recovery

28. Many participants acknowledged the importance of science, technology and innovation for all areas of sustainable development and presented various initiatives that had led to progress on inclusive technology transformation and bridging the digital divide. Enabling environments for science, technology and innovation that bridged the digital divide, fostered inclusivity and enhanced collaboration, needed to be prioritized.

29. Participants noted that the technological gap between the global North and global South had been widening and that science, technology and innovation must be

made accessible to developing countries. The active participation of youth, women and the most vulnerable populations in science, technology and innovation was crucial for sustainable development, and it was recommended that a day dedicated to youth in science, technology and innovation be organized during the next multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals. An inclusive technology transformation to bridge the digital divide would also require more collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches that fostered trust in science, including strategic approaches to link academia and policymaking, which were essential to more accessible science and actionable policy.

VI. Thematic review

Messages from the region

30. All the Chairs of the regional forums on sustainable development stressed the need to reform the global financial architecture, since the current system posed unmanageable debt burdens on developing countries, severely limiting their ability to implement their development plans. Other key issues included the need to strengthen national statistical systems to formulate data-driven policies and adequately track progress towards achieving the Goals, and the need to ensure a sound interface between science, policy and decision-making to spearhead innovation.

31. The significance of redefining business models to promote renewable energies, just transitions and green and resilient infrastructure was also emphasized, in particular in view of the potential for joint projects on solar energy, desalination and wastewater treatment. Another powerful driver of sustainable transformation was digital innovation, as long as the innovations were human-centred and green.

32. All participants noted that collaboration and partnerships among countries and stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector and young people, were pivotal. Voluntary national reviews not only served as an accountability mechanism, but also as a tool for engaging various actors in accelerating progress towards the Goals. Participants also emphasized the need to ensure that vulnerable groups were not left behind. Furthermore, participants noted that the voluntary national reviews should be forward-looking, based on disaggregated data and inclusive processes. Some participants suggested that, prior to presenting their voluntary national reviews, countries should introduce their national sustainable development strategies at regional forums, during which Governments and stakeholders would be able to share knowledge and engage in partnerships that would help to improve the quality of the reporting. It was noted that regional cooperation could play a central role in promoting peace, stability and resilience, which were central preconditions for accelerated progress towards achieving the Goals.

Transformation from the ground up: acting at the local level

33. Participants highlighted the need to democratize and localize the approaches to achieving the 2030 Agenda, including by engaging with young people and promoting intergenerational solidarity, in order to achieve the Goals and leave no one behind. Involving the most vulnerable, for example by partnering with slum dweller associations, was essential for facilitating change and influencing policies and programmes for targeted actions and budgeting in order to address the challenges to achieving Goal 11. Local authorities played a critical role by building capacity and ensuring coherence between the 2030 Agenda, national plans and local plans in the context of the Goals.

34. Participants shared various examples of local actions, including initiatives to provide tools and resources for empowering rural communities and efforts to integrate the 2030 Agenda through collaboration between regions and municipalities. The importance of overcoming administrative barriers for implementing subregional policies was highlighted. Participants acknowledged that voluntary local reviews provided unique opportunities to accelerate local action and advance the localization of the Goals. Participants also highlighted that the reporting process would be more effective if the local review were an integral component of the voluntary national review.

35. Multilevel governance, strengthening data ecosystems, multi-stakeholder engagement, capacity-building of local stakeholders and higher levels of financing at the local level were considered critical for effective localization. The importance of a whole-of-government approach, involving civil society, academia, business and young people, was also emphasized. Participants discussed the urgency of translating commitments into action and urged local authorities to align their plans with the Goals. They also urged States to empower local authorities to deliver on the Goals and mobilize resources to raise public awareness through the use of local languages and accessible language.

Small island developing States: from recovery to resilience in the face of multiple shocks

36. Specific actions were needed to address the resource mobilization challenges faced by small island developing States. Such actions included the reform of the international financial architecture and the adoption of the multidimensional vulnerability index, which would allow for a comprehensive assessment of the vulnerabilities of small island developing States and enable the international community to take account of such vulnerabilities in development finance decisions. Such reform, in conjunction with increased grant-based financing and debt relief, was identified as a key solution to the long-term challenges faced by small island developing States.

37. The need for significant investment in capacity-building measures was a recurring theme. Participants stressed the importance of investing in early warning systems, digital transformation and human capital development. Special emphasis was placed on improving the resilience of small island developing States against all types of external shocks. Several participants highlighted the importance of strengthening the digital capacities of small island developing States, as digital transformation was understood to be a critical enabler for the economic well-being and sustainable development of small island developing States.

38. International cooperation, partnership and inclusivity, underpinned by equity and fairness, were vital for addressing the disproportionate impact of crises on small island developing States and for building the resilience of small island developing States in that regard. The role of young people and women in addressing such challenges was acknowledged, as was the need for young people and women to be empowered through education, leadership development and policymaking, as they had a crucial role in achieving the sustainable development of small island developing States.

Overcoming middle-income countries' challenges in advancing the 2030 Agenda

39. Participants noted that, although middle-income countries were widely acknowledged as central to achieving the Goals at the global level, they faced diverse challenges and development gaps that were not captured by income-based indicators. In addition, fiscal constraints and a high debt burden had impeded the investments needed for middle-income countries to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and overcome the “middle-income trap” to achieve inclusive, sustainable and resilient growth. Energy and digital transformations, including strengthening data collection and analysis, were noted as opportunities that required financial resourcing and technical capacity-building.

40. Participants called for development cooperation to be better tailored to development needs and priorities, including financing needs, and for more concessional financing, technology transfer, capacity-building and market access, including through updated trade rules. It was necessary to address growing debt vulnerabilities, including through debt relief and innovative mechanisms. There was consensus among participants that measurements that went beyond GDP were critical for better assessment of the multidimensional nature of development challenges and vulnerabilities, and to guide policy decisions and international development cooperation. The launch of an intergovernmental process to go beyond GDP could be one of the most significant deliverables of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit.

African countries, least developed countries and landlocked developing countries: turning the tide, regaining lost ground, and embarking on the road to the Sustainable Development Goals

41. Least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and many African countries were at most risk of being left behind. Efforts for recovery from the polycrisis therefore needed to focus on building the resilience and transforming the structure of the economies of those countries. Lack of adequate and affordable financing presented the main impediment to achieving the Goals. Participants expressed their support for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal stimulus and the call by the Secretary-General for a complete overhaul of the international financial architecture to ensure that it delivered financial solutions to the countries most in need. Voices from African countries should also be included in discussions on reforms of the global financial architecture. Participants noted that the Doha Programme of Action was an ambitious and transformative framework intended to deliver long-lasting development gains in the least developed countries.

42. Panellists recognized the importance of South-South and triangular cooperation as an accelerator for achieving the Goals and emphasized the urgency for including all stakeholders, in particular young people and women, in action-oriented conversations. Participants emphasized the importance of acknowledging the differences not only between countries but also within countries, ensuring that the full range of structures and systems were taken into account. Several participants called for the implementation of the Goals to be expanded to all sectors, including music and the arts.

Perspectives from major groups and other stakeholders at the midpoint of the Goals: towards inclusive transformation

43. Perspectives of non-State actors were put forward. Panellists from the African, Asian and Pacific, European and Latin American and Caribbean regions called for a more sustainable, genuinely inclusive and human-rights-centric approach to development. The progress in the African region towards implementing sustainable development would largely determine whether the commitment to leaving no one behind became a reality. Although many Governments across the world had initiated democratic reforms and much had been done to further human rights and development, efforts to fulfilment commitments often remained superficial and therefore inadequate.

44. Partnerships at the national and international levels in monitoring, reporting and implementation were crucial. States underscored the critical importance of civil society in helping to create capacities for on-the-ground implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, with many highlighting their plans to engage with stakeholder groups, including the private sector through public-private partnerships, at the national level through annual forums. Spaces for civic engagement were shrinking, however, as authoritarian restrictions on civil society were on the rise in many parts of the world. Although much progress had been made in creating mechanisms for engaging civil societies, standing for environmental justice remained extremely dangerous in certain parts of the world.

45. Representatives of both States and major groups noted the need to amplify the voices of children and young people and of groups that were disadvantaged and/or experienced discrimination. Grass-roots initiatives led by local communities and vulnerable groups offered holistic, inclusive and effective approaches for achieving sustainability, tailored to the unique conditions of each context. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals also required investment and training in technologies for gathering data and monitoring and assessing progress towards the Goals.

VII. Opening of the ministerial segment

46. The President of the Council opened the ministerial segment by stating that, despite the chaos accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the recent recording of the hottest day on Earth was not time to panic but time to act. The 2030 Agenda must be the road map for such action, driving both stakeholders and States towards meaningful change. Although the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda had been reached in terms of time, the world was nowhere near achieving the 17 Goals. The forum was the last stop before the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, and at half-time the game was not yet over.

47. Two youth representatives delivered messages on behalf of youth, remarking that while every person had once been a child, no person could choose when or where to be born. Everyone was entitled to a life of dignity, security, joy, prosperity and opportunity. In the face of many global challenges, there was a need to focus on mutual humanity, recovery, resilience, preparedness and unity, with an eye on younger and future generations. Young people should not be considered in isolation, but as a part of the core group involved in building a sustainable world for all.

48. The Secretary-General highlighted the lack of progress towards the targets of the Goals. Every country needed to deliver on the promises of the 2030 Agenda, remembering that change was possible and making 2023 count. Clear plans must be presented at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, along with pledges to strengthen action through ambitious national interventions for reducing poverty and

inequality, alongside clear policies, investment plans and partnerships to drive progress across major Goal transitions. An annual Sustainable Development Goal stimulus of \$500 billion was needed for investments in sustainable development and climate action. Changes in business models, debt relief and the expansion of contingency financing for countries in need were also required and could be achieved with sufficient political will.

49. The President of the General Assembly focused on the urgent need for rapid, multilateral and substantive structural change to achieve the Goals. The world needed to align regulations with the Goals, calculate all externalities, aim to reduce negative externalities while increasing the positive, and build a science-based road map of implementation. The global community was still in the game, but the time had come for the game itself to be changed. The financing of that change was critically lacking, and investments were needed to change the course of development. It would be necessary for the Sustainable Development Goals Summit to convince the world that States would do better in sustainable development. The promise to leave no one behind needed to be kept.

50. The Chair of the International Panel on Climate Change stated that limiting climate change was essential for achieving all the Goals. Climate change was a threat multiplier; the complex threats currently occurring would only worsen with rising global temperatures. Adaptation efforts to date had not been sufficient and deep, rapid and sustained cuts to global greenhouse gas emissions were the best option for sustainable development. The knowledge and technology required to tackle climate change were already in place. International cooperation, effective ecosystem stewardship, inclusive governance, the sharing of diverse knowledge, and the sharing of benefits and burdens were therefore now imperative to shape the future through current choices.

VIII. Voluntary reviews

51. During the ministerial segment of the forum, representatives of 38 countries and, for the first time, of the European Union, presented their voluntary reviews. Presenters demonstrated and highlighted collaboration with stakeholders, including young people, civil society, the private sector and persons with disabilities, in preparing their voluntary reviews, and expressed their commitment to strengthen the inclusion of stakeholders in actions towards sustainable development.

52. Presenters noted the various challenges that ongoing crises posed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They remained confident and committed, however, to getting back on track towards the achievement of the Goals. That commitment allowed countries to approach challenges in a proactive way. They recognized what needed to be done to implement the 2030 Agenda, as well as the progress that had been made in some areas and the ways that countries had achieved it, which had created opportunities to learn from shared experiences.

53. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and challenges to recovery remained a major concern among countries because of the setbacks they represented for the achievement of the Goals. The vulnerabilities of countries had been highlighted by the pandemic, leading countries to reorganize priorities and adjust their 2030 Agenda implementation strategies. Since the pandemic, countries had taken proactive measures to increase the welfare of their inhabitants, including the most vulnerable.

54. Presenters identified access to financing as one of the most critical elements for countries for accelerating progress towards achieving the Goals. Several presenters emphasized the need to rethink how sustainable development and climate action were

financed in order to establish a financing structure that responded to the actual needs of countries and allowed for the effective management of resources, allocating them to where they were most needed. Although several presenters suggested reform of the international financial architecture other solutions were also proposed. Presenters indicated that countries had considered various ways, based on cooperation, in which to face the challenges related to financing and funding together. There was also a particular call to adapt the loss and damage fund and strengthen its operation.

55. Climate change and environmental protection were key concerns addressed in the reviews. Presenters highlighted the need to deliver strengthened and comprehensive climate action. Many outlined the ways in which they were including climate action in their policies and in other measures to address climate change. Mitigation strategies, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the building of climate resilience, reforestation and the scaling up of climate finance were some of the areas in which countries were concentrating their efforts. Presenters also noted the importance of compliance with international environmental commitments and of reliable financing for adaptation measures and moving towards a green economy.

56. Gender equality and social inclusion were emphasized as significant and cross-cutting issues, linked directly to the 2030 Agenda principle of leaving no one behind. Presenters shared how countries were working to guarantee equality and inclusion, underscoring that having the empowerment of women as a priority in national policies could assist in making progress not only towards Goal 5, on gender equality, but also towards all the other Goals.

57. Several presenters noted increasing droughts and the threat of water scarcity as major challenges to ensuring clean water and sanitation and stressed the need for related long-term strategies. Some shared their experiences and highlighted that actions for improving the supply, reliability and quality of water included support of the construction and maintenance of water-related infrastructure, in particular in rural areas, expanding water and sanitation infrastructure, integrating water resource management, establishing institutional frameworks and designing policies that focused on increasing access to clean water and sanitation. Presenters also recognized the key role of water in agriculture and food security.

58. There was also a special focus in the reviews on the significant progress made in investing in and using renewable energy sources. Despite a clear commitment to clean energy, the progress made in that regard remained insufficient for accomplishing the targets of the 2030 Agenda. Efforts needed to remain focused on achieving a just energy transition, which required investment in renewable energy sources, sustainable energy infrastructure and efforts to expand access to electricity in both rural and urban areas. Some countries placed a large emphasis on energy efficiency as a goal in itself, noting the importance of technology transfer and capacity-building for such purposes.

59. Presenters shared experiences of and approaches to building resilient infrastructure and promoting sustainable industrialization. Many strategies had focused on transport infrastructure for enhancing connectivity among both urban and rural areas, and the establishment of special economic and industrial zones that supported and encouraged industrialization and innovation.

60. Furthermore, presenters emphasized the need to tackle the lack of affordable quality housing as the main challenge to having sustainable and resilient communities. Some stressed the need not only to provide affordable housing, which would entail a special focus on supporting low- and middle-income earners, but also to go further, which would entail including specific support in order to guarantee housing access to youth and female-headed households. Attention was brought to land use, and it was suggested that the main goal should not simply be to expand the use,

but to have adequate planning that would lead to more effective land use. The importance of building hazard-resilient communities was also emphasized, as well as the crucial need for countries to strengthen local government and community participation.

61. Presenters emphasized that having participatory approaches to every Goal was necessary for effectively accelerating progress. They also stressed the critical nature of effective multistakeholder partnerships for following up on the commitments made towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the preparation and elaboration of voluntary reviews. Furthermore, they noted the critical role of cooperation among countries for achieving the Goals and recognized the special and valuable impacts of both North-South and South-South cooperation.

62. A key message was that technology and innovation were important for addressing climate change and increasing progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Presenters noted, as a cross-cutting issue, the importance of embracing the digital transformation and harnessing the power of technology to achieve the Goals. Technology was one of the most effective tools for achieving progress towards almost every Goal. Presenters shared experiences as to how technology and innovation had helped countries to make progress towards achieving the Goals. They indicated that countries had expressed support for and encouraged the transfer of technology.

63. The importance of data for following up on and monitoring progress was underscored by various presenters. Some drew attention to the importance of having accurate and disaggregated data during decision-making processes and establishing adequate Goal strategies that addressed each country's specific circumstances and needs.

64. Good governance practices, which were key to addressing the Goals and their targets, were encouraged by countries. Institutional mechanisms, processes and tools were critical in ensuring proper planning and effective implementation of action to achieve the Goals, as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of other goals and targets. Such action should be accompanied by the establishment of effective national development plans aligned with the Goals, adequate financing and resources, and ensuring appropriate public sector capacities and capabilities.

65. Presenters stressed the need to continue strengthening and establishing new partnerships and avenues for cooperation. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, and in particular at the halfway point to 2030, it had become evident that common commitments and efforts were required. Presenters noted the need for even more strategic and impactful partnerships for accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and highlighted the important role public-private partnerships played in contributing to progress in achieving them. Governments played a key role in providing an enabling environment conducive to every type of cooperation and partnership, and in particular the meaningful inclusion of civil society in policymaking and implementation strategies.

IX. General debate

66. The Sustainable Development Goals Summit was seen as a unique opportunity for renewing a shared global commitment and taking action to "rescue" the Goals and implement the 2030 Agenda. Participants emphasized the need for the Summit to serve as a moment that would allow for ambition, political will, solidarity, multilateral cooperation and multi-stakeholder engagement, and the adoption of a whole-of-society approach.

67. Participants reaffirmed the commitment of their countries to the 2030 Agenda, including the achievement of the Goals. They also expressed deep concern about the 2030 Agenda being severely off track, with progress towards achieving the Goals being, in the majority of cases, slow, stalled or even in reverse. There were calls for greater efforts to overcome the impacts of interlinked challenges that had impeded progress, including the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery, conflict and climate change. Renewed commitment to the 2030 Agenda and collaborative action from the international community were deemed critical to accelerating progress and effectively addressing the current setbacks.

68. The Goals remained a key priority, and several participants echoed scientific conclusions that the Goals were still achievable if countries accelerated their collaboration. The 2030 Agenda was recognized as a common road map for sustainable and inclusive policies. Many countries had incorporated the Goals into their national development plans and policies. Several countries referred to actions highlighted in their voluntary national reviews for implementing the Goals, including actions for global and national policy coherence and Goal interlinkages in transformative domestic policies and strategies.

69. Strengthening partnerships was highlighted as pivotal to achieving the Goals. Participants emphasized the critical importance of international cooperation, as well as cooperation with the private sector. There was recognition that partnerships with the private sector would help foster innovation, the mobilization of financial resources and the implementation of new methods, leading to significant positive impacts on the global society.

70. Access to financing was identified as a key challenge to achieving sustainable development. At a time when developing countries were grappling with issues of debt distress, high interest rates and constrained fiscal space, there were only limited options for affordable access to financing. Many participants therefore called for greater access to financing for developing countries and related actions to ensure stable macroeconomic fundamentals, the full implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, the fulfilment of official development assistance commitments, the reform of the international financial architecture, financing eligibility criteria, debt restructuring, debt relief for climate action, and access to innovative financing mechanisms, including impact investing.

71. It was widely recognized that increased access to concessional financing was pivotal for getting the Sustainable Development Goals back on track. In addition, participants from various countries called for measures beyond GDP, and the application of the multidimensional vulnerability index for small island developing States in order to improve development assistance. The multidimensional vulnerability index was regarded as an important tool for considering different types of vulnerabilities when accessing concessional resources, in particular for addressing the impacts of climate change.

72. Many participants expressed support for the Sustainable Development Goal stimulus, which was seen as an important initiative for boosting action on financing. Several participants highlighted the need for greater support for countries in special situations, in particular for the least developed countries, land-locked developing countries and small island developing States. Participants also highlighted the challenges faced by middle-income countries in accessing loans and grants.

73. Participants reiterated the pledge of countries to leave no one behind. The eradication of poverty remained a top priority and food security was another critical topic of discussion. Many participants noted that hunger and malnutrition were major concerns and emphasized the importance of comprehensive measures for achieving

Goal 2 (zero hunger). Some recognized the critical role of women in improving food production and distribution and placed particular emphasis on empowering women and promoting gender equality in agriculture.

74. Many participants referred to gender equality and women's empowerment in relation to sustainable development. Participants highlighted the importance of eliminating gender-based violence, narrowing gender inequalities in various sectors and increasing women's representation in decision-making processes and leadership roles, among other things. Several participants also announced the commitments and associated initiatives of their countries for solving challenges regarding the rights of children and young people. They emphasized the significance of investing in excellent education and encouraging social inclusion to assist children's well-being and development.

75. Addressing climate action, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation remained an urgent priority. Given that climate change represented an existential threat, bridging the climate financing gap was imperative. Participants noted that a financial architecture that prioritized accessible financing for disaster risk reduction and climate action was urgently needed. They also expressed their support for the Bridgetown Initiative and called for the implementation of the loss and damage fund. Participants also emphasized the unique vulnerabilities of small island developing States. Many participants provided specific examples of national experiences and plans related to climate action, including transitioning to a green economy, reducing carbon emissions, embracing a just energy transition and committing to net zero. They also noted the importance of access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy.

76. In line with the priorities of the forum, many participants highlighted access to clean water and sanitation as a key priority. They noted the critical importance of protecting water resources for sustainable development and emphasized the close link between clean water and sanitation and human well-being, economic prosperity and environmental sustainability.

77. Participants also encouraged increased investment in science, technology and innovation as a driver for sustainable growth, noting the importance of technology and digital progress for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals and overall development. Digital transformation was also highlighted as a critical component, with calls for the digital divide to be bridged and equal access to technology and digital literacy ensured, in particular for vulnerable and marginalized communities. The importance of technology transfer and cooperation in helping developing countries achieve the Goals was also highlighted by various participants. Some also called for more transparency, accuracy, timeliness, relevance and quality in data collection, including in support of the voluntary national reviews.

78. Several participants noted the negative impact of conflict and terrorism on the progress of their countries towards achieving the Goals and emphasized that peace and security were prerequisites for sustainable development, in line with the 2030 Agenda. Some participants noted that equal access to justice was a critical enabler to achieving the Goals.

Annex

List of countries and groups presenting voluntary reviews of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in 2023

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Bahrain** | 20. Liechtenstein** |
| 2. Barbados** | 21. Lithuania** |
| 3. Belgium** | 22. Maldives** |
| 4. Bosnia and Herzegovina** | 23. Mongolia** |
| 5. Brunei Darussalam** | 24. Poland** |
| 6. Burkina Faso** | 25. Portugal** |
| 7. Cambodia** | 26. Romania** |
| 8. Canada** | 27. Rwanda** |
| 9. Central African Republic** | 28. Saint Kitts and Nevis* |
| 10. Chile*** | 29. Saudi Arabia** |
| 11. Comoros** | 30. Singapore** |
| 12. Croatia** | 31. Slovakia** |
| 13. Democratic Republic of the Congo** | 32. Tajikistan** |
| 14. Fiji** | 33. Timor-Leste** |
| 15. France** | 34. Turkmenistan** |
| 16. Guyana** | 35. United Republic of Tanzania** |
| 17. Iceland** | 36. Uzbekistan** |
| 18. Ireland** | 37. Vietnam** |
| 19. Kuwait** | 38. Zambia** |
| | 39. European Union* |

* Presenting for the first time.

** Presenting for the second time.

*** Presenting for the third time.