

**Remarks by Ambassador Elizabeth Cousens, U.S.
Representative to ECOSOC, for the US/Canada/Israel Team,
1st Session of the SDG Open Working Group**

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Thank you, Mr. Chair/Mr. President

I am pleased to take the floor on behalf of Canada, Israel, and the United States. We welcome this first session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and thank all those whose hard work has gotten us to this point, especially our dedicated co-facilitators, Ambassador Kamau and Ambassador Kőrösi, Ambassador Viotti and our Brazilian colleagues for shepherding the process from the beginning, Ambassador Šahović, the President of the General Assembly, and our UN colleagues. We greatly appreciate your efforts, and we have important work now to do.

We gather at a time of accelerating change. Our populations, our economies, our cities are evolving at a furious pace. We face unprecedented opportunities to improve people's lives, livelihoods, and prospects in every country on the planet. Hundreds of millions have been lifted out of poverty in the last decade; and renewed global commitment and more vigorous national action, we are convinced, can make extreme poverty a thing of the past. Yet today, more than 1 billion people still live on less than \$1.25 a day, 2.5 billion still people lack sanitation and 29,000 children still die daily mainly from preventable causes. The gap between rich and poor has widened and we face mounting pressures on the natural resources on which we all depend. We believe we can and must decisively change this reality.

In this context, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals has a critical task. We have been asked to develop or build support for a set of global goals that integrates all three pillars of sustainable development around common priorities for action. Poverty eradication and inclusive growth must be at the center of this effort, and we are encouraged to hear so many colleagues converge around this point. We must articulate a high level of ambition along with a credible path to success.

We have also been encouraged by the work of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the vision expressed in their Monrovia communiqué for a "people-centered and planet-sensitive agenda" to "end extreme poverty in all its forms in the context of sustainable development and to have in place the building blocks of sustained prosperity for all." We look forward to the Panel's report as an important early contribution to our own deliberations in the Open Working Group. (We have further appreciated the Panel's commitment to urge greater attention to MDG acceleration and to ensure that any MDG "unfinished business" is incorporated into the post-2015 agenda.)

In the Open Working Group, we need to ensure that our own ambition and ideas are driven by evidence. We should reflect cutting-edge knowledge, science, and practice from all corners of the globe and seek fresh thinking, smart ideas, and new insights. As an inter-governmental Group, we will especially need to draw on the expertise and advice of leading thinkers and practitioners from academia, the scientific community, civil society, the private sector, as well as other levels of government and, of course, the wider UN system. Diverse perspectives will be essential.

We believe the first phase of the Group's work should therefore be dedicated to learning and listening to outside ideas and perspectives, particularly from the scientific and research community, in order to develop a strong intellectual foundation for our common work.

Our work begins in a crowded field. We will need to stay focused on our own task while seeking to draw from, and where ready to feed into, a wide range of related processes on the road to 2015, including the Special Session on MDGs this fall and General Assembly dialogues and conferences on related issues.

We are committed to rolling up our sleeves and seeing this Group making a substantive, practical contribution to the 2015 development agenda. It has taken us some time to get here, but we now have an opportunity to move forward with renewed focus and energy. We need to be bold, practical, prepared for honest dialogue about our differences, and always open to ideas. Today, we make statements. Tomorrow, we should start a conversation.

We look forward to working with all of you in the days ahead.

Thank you.

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