

Your Excellency, President of ECOSOC, Ambassador Martin Sadjik,

friends of sustainable development

We live in momentous times. Participating as we are in the first large HLPF, we are creating the future basis and institutional framework for sustainable development. If we succeed, future generations shall write that those who made the decisions during the formative years of HLPF created the foundation that steered the world onto its right course and safeguarded the well being for all. If we fail, future generations will be harsh in their assessment of our decisions these two years, and condemn our actions to be among the worst failures of this century.

The Rio+20 Outcome Document, aptly named The Future We initiated 14 processes of which the decision to establish the HLPF has been deemed as one of the most important ones. HLPF was infused with high aspirations, but were the decision making powers given HLPF in UNGA resolution 67/290 to safeguard the future of sustainable development commensurate with these aspirations?

The Brundtland Commission through its report Our Common Future, placed the concept Sustainable Development firmly on the political agenda in 1987, and the resolution establishing the HLPF in 2013, a quarter century later, is a synthesis of these year's struggle to understand the ramifications of sustainable development including good governance.

The HLPF is about all these elements, and that begs the question – is the HLPF strong enough to shoulder such challenges now and for the next 20 years? An institution is only as strong as its weakest link, and as we these days are battling with the future of HLPF, we must ask a number of questions. Can we

- Improve what we see needs improving
- Strengthen what we see needs strengthening
- Interpret what we think is unclear

The way we understand HLPF is that it is not a segment of ECOSOC, and to be able to fulfil its mandate must be granted full institutional integrity with its own bureau and a strong, well resourced secretariat. Only then will it be able to carry out the intentions expressed through the Rio+20 Outcome document.

No other resolution adopted by the UNGA has ever expressed such strong support to NGOs, civil society and major groups. No other document has awarded such participatory privileges to civil society. Will the UN be able to carry out these decisions and will member states accept them?

We are mindful of the changing nature of intergovernmental processes as well as the changing nature of global politics. The evolving nature of the normative contributions of United Nations bodies to world politics are often less appreciated than the UN being able to arrive at immediately implementable agreements. However, these contributions have immensely enriched the intergovernmental system and are often seen as a prerequisite to successful implementation of agreements. Among these normative contributions is the involvement of non-state actors in global processes.

We understand that modalities dictate the degree of engagement of stakeholders in any intergovernmental process. The Rio 2012 Outcome Document and the HLPF allow for maximum involvement of all stakeholders.

An often stated truism is: unless governments own intergovernmental processes, policies will never be taken seriously. Unless people feel ownership with development, little will be implemented. The HLPF offers a unique opportunity to combine these two political realities.

Agenda setting and decision making has always been considered the prerogative of member states at the UN. The member states are and will remain the decision makers. However, civil society is uniquely positioned to see and experience problems, often long before they come to the knowledge of authorities. History is full of such examples.

When the US marine scientist Rachel Carson with her book Silent Spring in 1962 called out about an impending global environmental disaster, she was dubbed an hysterical woman by many of her fellow male experts and scientists and ignored by the authorities. Today we know that had we listened to this courageous woman and made sure her concerns had reached the intergovernmental agendas, the world would have been better off.

The world had learned a lesson and one of the key agendas for the Rio Conference was precisely called “emerging issues”. Agenda setting is a key point if HLPF.

The natural place for civil society and stakeholders at intergovernmental processes has been at the end of a session. However making a final statement is making a final statement. Its timing underlines the idea that whatever we have to say, does not have any value in helping the decision-makers to reach a conclusion. With our knowledge and understanding and direct contact with grass roots experiencing and living sustainable development, we can provide useful input.

It is ironic and inappropriate to restrict access with respect to sustainable development matters, be that at agenda setting or in participation, because history has shown that progress in sustainable development only occurs with a robust involvement by civil society.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights recognizes the rights to participate and to access to information, and the UN General Assembly implemented these principles last year by adopting resolution 67/290 establishing the High Level Political Forum.

The High Level Political Forum points in the right direction, but we can make it stronger within the remit of the present resolution. Paragraph 29 of 67/290 allows us to do so.

The Rio Outcome Document wanted us to do more and not less.

Your Excellency

We live in auspicious times and have a good chance during the next two years until 2016 to strengthen HLPF and make it the institution it was mean to be. Only then will future generations say, the decisions delegates and civil society made in 2014 – 2016 were the right ones. And these people gave us the Future We Want.

That I hope will be our legacy.

Jan-Gustav Strandenaes

For the NGO Major Group