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**Follow-up and review of implementation of the agenda and the agreed goals and targets**  
(Intergovernmental negotiations of Post-2015 agenda, New York, January 21 2015)

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

Thank you for your invitation and the opportunity to speak to you today.

My presentation has two parts:

First is a short reminder as to *why* we need follow-up and review

And second, some specific ideas on *what* this follow-up and review could look like

### 1) Why?

When Member States agreed on the Rio+20 outcome document entitled *The Future We Want*, many commentators warned that it would only prove valuable if the goals and policies it proposed were actually implemented. Undeniably, *deficits in implementation* represent the biggest problem we face in the area of sustainable development. The Secretary-General's Synthesis Report calls for a "participatory, responsive and transformational course of action", and speaks of a "new culture of shared responsibility" and a "new paradigm of accountability" - not to the UN or other Member States but "to the people themselves". In the discussions over the last weeks, I sense agreement that the Post-2015 Agenda needs to become a "peoples' agenda" and that the *national* level is decisive when it comes to implementation and the ways in which people can hold their governments accountable in the interest of effective and timely implementation.

In that context, review procedures can help create transparency and foster learning effects, strengthen political will, promote capacity building, and encourage government's accountability to their citizens. In contrast to more descriptive monitoring processes, which are limited for the most part to observation and data collection, a review aims at a more analytical assessment of the reasons behind successful implementation (or lack thereof). Its ultimate goal is quality assurance and to provide an evidence base for identifying best practices or policy changes that need to be made.

It is important to start negotiating the follow-up to the Post-2015 agenda *now*. If you can be certain what to expect from the follow-up process, you may be more likely to agree on more ambitious commitments, especially if the review process does not consist only of monitoring and reporting but provides *support* as well. A Mutual Review based on the principle of shared responsibility – in the spirit of the much-anticipated new Global Partnership for Sustainable Development—could help form the multilateral consensus and action around an ambitious Post-2015 agenda. So, not only could the review process contribute to the more consistent implementation of the SDGs: If it is designed wisely, it can also help to find consensus on difficult issues in the current negotiations – such as the *means of implementation* and appropriate ways to *differentiate* and take individual national conditions, priorities, and capacities adequately into account. The review could and should deal with these issues, with providing *tailored support* for local-level implementation and a follow-up whether states have complied with their own national commitments.

## 2) How?

Building on the assessment of existing reviews and what I have learned from your previous debates on the review issue, I see potential for an evolving consensus around a review process that would:

- ▶ First: give the Member States sovereign control over the *national commitments* they enter into  
(...as a state-led bottom-up process, with a focus on the national level and an adequately differentiated approach.)
- ▶ and second, with the help of the review process, *link* these national commitments to globally agreed goals; support, measure, and evaluate their implementation; generate learning effects; and promote capacity building  
... in a multi-level process, starting at the national level, moving on to the regional level, and finally at the global level, this could be a task for the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). According to its mandate, the HLPF under the auspices of the ECOSOC is to “follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments” and to provide “political leadership, guidance and recommendations.” The resolution on the HLPF states that a voluntary and state-led *review process*, is to be built on, and subsequently replace, the existing ECOSOC review process, the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) and its National Voluntary Presentations (NVPs). This “renewed” review, now at the HLPF, will start in 2016 and it could have two cycles.

### First Cycle: Process to Review national commitments

At the Post-2015 Summit in September, the UN General Assembly could call upon Member States to formulate their own *national commitments* on all SDGs. The introduction to the OWG Proposal already invites governments to translate the aspirational global targets into their “own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances”. And many countries already have sustainability strategies or development strategies – so the task would be to align them with the new agenda.

In doing so, all Member States should be called upon to work towards the highest possible level of transparency and participation. National parliaments should be involved and national consultation processes should be carried out. Governments must also contribute to this by providing for corresponding freedoms on the national level.

Up to now, for many local NGOs, the UN discussion of the SDGs has been quite abstract. If the global goals and targets were broken down into national commitments for more sustainable development, this could change (> people’s agenda).

Then, in the first cycle, starting in 2016, Member States could be invited to voluntarily present and discuss their national commitments at the UN-level.

First, this global-level review could discuss whether national commitments are *sufficiently specific and ambitious*, but at the same time, *realistic*. The review should also ensure that all national commitments added together actually *correspond* to the global goals and targets, and that the burdens are distributed *fairly*. Both the traditional and new donor countries should be called upon to clearly state their commitments to provide for means of implementation.

Second, the UN review of national commitments should evaluate whether countries have the necessary *means of implementation* at their disposal (e.g., access to funding, technology or policy knowledge, i.e. a needs-based assessment). If not, they should be provided with support to *mobilize* the necessary resources. This support would provide an *incentive* to participate in the review process.

That way, the review could help to ensure that different parties' interests in two key areas are taken into account: means of implementation and differentiated responsibilities. You could follow-up whether the donor countries are living up to their financial commitments and are doing more to promote technology transfer. And you could evaluate whether newly industrialized countries also make their own funding commitments and whether developing countries are also doing their best to mobilize their own resources.

In that context, the review could also be open to *partnerships for sustainable development* and *voluntary commitments*, like those in the UN's *SD in Action* Registry. Multi-stakeholder initiatives are seen by many as additional and flexible means of implementation. Up to now, however, the overall picture as regards their performance is *mixed*. Therefore, the UN should have a mechanism to evaluate these initiatives, to identify success factors, and to determine which ones have potential to be replicated or scaled-up.

## **Second cycle: Reviewing the implementation of national commitments**

In the second cycle, the voluntary *review of implementation* of national commitments could begin.

Since governments are accountable first and foremost to their own citizens, the review cycle should (again) take the *national level* as its starting point. The Member States should produce national (progress) reports, which they should discuss in parliament, during consultation processes, and/or with sustainable development councils, local forms of monitoring should be used to collect information on whether policies prove to be local-context sensitive and are having a positive impact at the community level. Efforts will need to be undertaken to strengthen the necessary institutional capacities.

A *regional "peer review"* could build on these national processes and offer a platform for exchange between the countries in a region. Member States could exchange ideas on joint and cross-border challenges with neighboring states and discuss best practices for implementing the SDGs at the local level. This could build on existing regional reviews (like the APRM) and be facilitated by the UN Regional Commissions in cooperation with other regional organizations and regional development banks. Moreover, the regional reviews could help prepare the global review.

At the *global* level, the review could build on and further develop two components that are already part of ECOSOC's AMR now: a *Thematic Review* and a *Country Review*.

1) The resolution on the HLPF states that it will have an annually changing thematic focus, aligned with ECOSOC's thematic focus. In that context, an annual *Thematic Review* could concentrate on the progress of implementation *in that area*. This thematic part of the review would allow a closer look at new and emerging, cross-cutting, or particularly urgent issues.

2) The second part of the HLPF Review could be a *Mutual Country Review*. This would take a *broader* view, covering all of the SDGs and giving the individual Member States the opportunity

to voluntarily present and discuss their national implementation experiences. Their national reports should cover not only progress but also problems and obstacles to implementation. This is essential in promoting learning and providing targeted support on critical issues.

In addition, the review should refer to supplementary information, that is reports compiling input from the *UN entities* and from the *Major Groups and other stakeholders* (as it is done in the UPR under the HRC).

The centerpiece of the annual Mutual Country Reviews should be the *voluntary presentations* of the national reports and their *interactive discussion*. The presentations should be made by high-level elected officials from the capitals and should follow a harmonized format. Of course, it would be impossible to present the national reports in their entirety. Instead, for each of the 17 goals, Member States could discuss

- one *positive example of their implementation efforts* that could provide inspiration to other states, as well as
- one *area in which they face particular challenges* and would like feedback and support.

Then there would be a round of questions, and recommendations would be made.

Since the HLPF meets only eight days per year, the majority of the review process would be held on behalf of the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC (replacing the AMR – but earlier in the year). The outcome reports would be discussed during the HLPF plenary sessions in early July.

The results of the review would constitute an evidence base for the *political leadership, guidance, and recommendations* the HLPF is mandated to provide. Accordingly, the review could also inform the HLPF's *Ministerial Declaration*.

To conclude, the key question is, of course, what kind of Post-2015 review would be accepted by you, the UN Member States. The review process recommended here fully respects national sovereignty by working with national commitments and by focusing on the accountability of national governments to their own people. Accordingly, the process starts from the bottom up at the national level. Within the voluntary mutual review at the regional and UN level, states would be reviewed in line with the national targets that *they set for themselves*.

To be effective, the review mechanism needs to have both incentives and stringency, here by providing for support and learning, by ensuring transparency and a harmonized framework, and by involving non-governmental actors and experts.

Ideally, such a periodic review would pick up momentum over time, with states mutually encouraging one another's progress in an iterative process.

Thank you very much for your attention.

*Further reading:*

Marianne Beisheim, *Reviewing the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals and Partnerships. A Proposal for a Multi-level Review at the High-level Political Forum*, SWP Research Paper 1/2015, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.

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