

Post-2015 Inter-governmental negotiations / Declaration
Tuesday 17 February 2015
Statement by the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Co-facilitators,

I align myself with the statement by the European Union and would like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

A couple of weeks ago, my youngest daughter, who is 13, was doing a homework assignment on the SDGs. I was pleasantly surprised to see that she was working from a child-friendly version of the goals and targets agreed by the Open Working Group.

I was impressed to see how all 17 goals were presented in language that 13-year olds can easily understand, both in words and drawings.

I was also impressed to learn that, at the same time, the content and integrity of the work of the OWG was fully preserved.

This goes to show that it is indeed possible to cast complex issues in simple, understandable language.

So co-facilitators,

We agree with you and many others that the declaration should be concise, simple, ambitious and visionary.

We agree with you that we should break with the past by focusing on the future.

The future belongs to young people.

Therefore, the declaration should be understood by the young. And even more so, it should inspire them. It should be the subject of conversation in class rooms and around dinner tables all over the world.

From a communication perspective, it is crucial that the declaration is understood by all beyond the square mile around the UN premises here in New York. A universal agenda should have universal reach.

So maybe this time we should not engage in another attempt to write poetry by committee. Maybe we should not play it safe by piecing together pages and pages of previously agreed language. The Declaration is not and should not be an Outcome Document.

We have full confidence in you, co-facilitators, to present us with a draft text that meets our expectations. We suggest that you ask a couple of young people to help in drafting the declaration, or at least in proofreading it, to make it vision proof. Ask a 13-year old what he or she means by leaving no-one behind, and the answer might be surprisingly clear.

Co-facilitators,

If the goals and targets address the WHAT of the post-2015 agenda, and the Global Partnership and Means of Implementation the HOW, then the Declaration should illuminate the WHY of our new agenda.

The Secretary-General's synthesis report contains some powerful and inspiring language about the WHY. This includes the six key concepts of dignity, people, prosperity, planet, justice and partnership.

In order to keep the Declaration concise and inspiring, we do not really see a need to elaborate on or duplicate the goals and targets or language that belongs elsewhere in the post-2015 agenda.

Also, the Declaration should not read like a table of contents.

And we should try to avoid some of the language that, while keeping us busy in our day-to-day work here in the halls of the UN, hardly captures the imagination of the billions of people out there in the real world.

In conclusion, co-facilitators,

Vision does not require many words.

A transformative approach, moving away from business as usual, is not necessarily served best by existing language to which we are so accustomed here at the UN.

Vision only works if it mesmerizes.

So let's agree on a Declaration that does exactly that.

Thank you.

+++++