

High-Level Political Forum 2016

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Ensuring that No One is Left Behind: Reaching the most vulnerable

Statement by Christian Friis Bach

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is less than two weeks ago that the new game - Pokemon Go – was released, and there are already tens of millions of young people walking around trying to catch Pokemons on every corner, in communities and cities in this country – and it is spreading very fast to all parts of the world. It is not good for road safety, something we are responsible for in UNECE, but it is encouraging sign of what we can do with information technology. We need a similar programme, “SDG Go” using social media and mobilizing people – and young people – to monitor on every corner, in every community, in every city, if there are people who are left behind, discrimination or policies that do not deliver. We can do it. Let us learn from new technology.

It is also important to remember that the reason why so many young people join Pokemon Go is because they grew up with Pokemon, learned to know the many Pokomon characters when they were children in primary school, 15-20 years ago. This is why it is crucial that we teach our kids about the Sustainable Development Goals, so they grow up with the SDGs, know them and therefore join them and mobilize for them when they grow up. It can be done – even though it is a complex agenda, even though there are 17 goals and 169 targets. There are more than 250 Pokemon characters, I have understood from my son.

So let us use modern technology to mobilize and monitor, to produce better data, more data, better statistics. This is key to ensure that we leave no one behind and to understand the needs of the most vulnerable groups. Remember how the world only mobilized strongly against child mortality and

maternal mortality when we got reliable data and realized how bad the solution was around 10 years ago. Now mortality rates are – very encouragingly – finally going down in many countries. Remember how the Human Development Reports mobilized political action by telling us – with disaggregated data for each country and for each region within a country – where children did not go to school and where people suffered from hunger. We must invest significantly in new data, new statistics and new methodology and here, all Regional Commissions are strongly involved.

There are still areas we do not know how to measure. In UNECE, our member States developed last year a proposal for indicators for gender equality – 42 gender indicators – but we still do not know how to consistently, and across borders, measure violence against women. Road crashes kill more people and children than HIV/Aids and Malaria – but the statistics are really bad in many poor countries. There are still around 25 countries in the world, where we do not know how many children go to school or how many people live below the poverty line! We have so many new opportunities to get data and we are ready in the Regional Commissions with our Statistical Committees and capacity to work with all of you to achieve it.

Secondly, we must remember that data and statistics is, and must be, a two-way street. We must ensure access to information and data and strong public participation. I remember years back, when I visited a health clinic in Kenya that outside the clinic there were large signs showing both when the clinic got new medicine or money, and the prices for medicine and treatments. This transparency helped poor people to get their medicine, their treatment and not to be forced to pay for it, if it was free. And with information technology – catching not only Pokemons but people and policies – we can take this further and shape an information revolution. To do this we must ensure citizens the legal access to information and public participation. We promised this with the Rio declaration Principle 10 and now with SDG 16 and it is crucial because access to information and public participation gives better decisions, stronger actions and is key to ensure that we leave no one behind. I encourage all countries to join our Aarhus Convention on access to information and public participation or to develop their own strong Principle 10 laws and conventions, as the countries in Latin America are doing with the help of ECLAC. This is key to ensure that we leave no one behind.

Finally, we must greatly improve our analysis based on the enormous amount of data and statistics we have and will get. Better analysis is key to inform new and better policies and ensure we leave no one behind. We take bad decisions because we do not do our analysis based on the principles of sustainable development. One example is air pollution. When discussing new policies to reduce air pollution, we often only look at the costs to car producers or factories of new filters or technology.

We forget to include in our analysis, that air pollution kills more than 7 million people every year, that the related cost of air pollution is 1-10 percent of GDP, that it lowers agricultural yields, damage buildings and has significant climate effects. And we fail to include how innovation and new technology to reduce air pollution can help to create more jobs and green jobs if we invest in reducing air pollution. All this must be included in our analysis. Another example is inequality where we only now understand the severe and negative impact of inequality on sustainable development. Therefore, we must ensure much stronger analysis where we include the environmental and social costs. We must develop new measures to measure growth and wealth. Here we are ready to help in the Regional Commissions with our strong analytical capacity and also with our normative work to help to translate the global goals into strong national, regional and global policies and plans for sustainable development. This will help to ensure that we implement Agenda 2030 and leave no one behind.

If it is possible – within a few weeks – to engage millions and millions of people, and young people, to walk around on our streets and catch Pokemons, I feel confident that we with new information technology, a data revolution, access to information, public participation and better analysis can ensure strong policies, stronger plans for sustainable development and ensure that we leave no one behind. Let us work together to achieve this.