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Mr. Wu Hongbo
Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

Opening Remarks High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

10 July 2017, New York

Your Excellency, Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, President of Economic and Social Council,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you all to the opening of the 2017 high-level political forum on sustainable development – the HLPF.

I am honoured to be speaking at this HLPF, a central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

I am also proud that I was part of its development through the historic post-2015 negotiation process.

Our shared agenda for sustainable development recognizes our common responsibility for eradicating fundamental deprivations and enabling fulfilling lives for all, while living sustainably within the natural boundaries of the Earth.

Our aspirations touch all lives. Even though we have different responsibilities, we remain accountable to all people and to each other in the pursuit of our shared goal.

This recognition of our shared and interconnected destiny must also inform how we move forward with implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

It is only by working together that we can achieve a world with equal opportunities for all, so that every human being can realize their full potential.

The High Level Political Forum provides us with the global platform for making this happen.

Enthusiasm and expectations are growing – this year, we have forty-four countries presenting their Voluntary National Reviews. Member States have negotiated an action oriented Ministerial Declaration. An unprecedented number of stakeholders – 2,400 – have registered to attend.

The complementary part of the HLPF programme is no less noteworthy.

We received 270 applications for side events and were able to confirm over 120, many with a high-level participation.

The SDG Business Forum will be attended by over 600 participants mostly from the private sector and over 100 Chief Sustainability Officers will attend their meeting on the margins of HLPF.

The Partnership Exchange will bring a large number of partnerships to showcase their work around the SDGs and to possibly make new partnerships.

The SDG Learning Center will provide valuable courses with concrete implementation tools.

All these endeavours must take into account where we are with the SDGs.

The Secretary General's Report shows us what the data are saying. Today, as mandated by Member States to inform the follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of the high-level political forum, I have the honour to present the Report of the Secretary-General on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals

While we are indeed conducting a special thematic review of Goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 9 and 14, in addition to Goal 17, this report bridges all of them, supporting our understanding of the Agenda as holistic and indivisible.

The report is based on the global indicator framework developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, which was adopted by the Statistical Commission in March of this year, by ECOSOC in June and by the General Assembly last Thursday.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I read this report, I am struck by how far we have come, and also by how far we need to go.

For example, nearly one billion people escaped extreme poverty since 1999. Even with this progress, though, over 767 million people worldwide still lived on less than \$1.90 a day in 2013.

Many of the extreme poor are now concentrated in regions where fragile settings, conflict and other systemic issues make effective interventions harder.

But there are also many living in pockets of poverty in otherwise robust economies, which indicates they may be especially hard to reach.

Between 2000 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio declined by 37 per cent. However, to achieve the global target of less than 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030 requires more than double the current rate of progress.

The risk of dying prematurely, between the ages of 30 and 70, from one of four main non-communicable diseases – cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease – fell from 23 per cent to 19 per cent between 2000 and 2015, but progress is not rapid enough to meet the 2030 target.

Gender inequality continues to persist worldwide, depriving women and girls of their basic rights and opportunities.

Even though data are limited, the Report shows that close to one-fifth of women between the ages of 15 and 49 reported having experienced some form of violence from a partner in the preceding 12 months.

And even at the macro level, we see that women's participation in single or lower houses of national parliament reached 23.4 per cent in 2017, just 10 percentage points higher than it was in 2000, and still far from the desired level of equality.

I am also struck, once again, by the deeply interconnected nature of the different elements of the 2030 Agenda: both challenges and solutions connect different goals and targets. This makes it imperative that we work together across silos, sectors, disciplines and individual roles or competencies.

Our efforts to protect the environment and conserve oceans have led to some improvements, but challenges still remain. Planetary warming continued in 2016, setting a record of about 1.1 degrees centigrade above the pre-industrial period. The extent of global sea ice fell to the second lowest on record.

The adverse impacts by climate change on the oceans and other ecosystems is increasing: the proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels declined from 90 per cent in 1974 to 69 per cent in 2013; and increasing ocean acidification levels endanger marine ecosystems worldwide.

Such impacts are felt disproportionately by the poor, many of whose livelihoods depend on the health of the ocean.

In another example, eradicating poverty requires eliminating deprivations and maintaining good health over the entire durations of people's lives.

Ending hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition for all is just as important for this purpose, as is the universal access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

But while progress is undeniable in the fight against childhood malnutrition, there are still around 155 million children under age 5 worldwide who were stunted. And globally, 11 per cent of world's population – 793 million people – still suffers from hunger.

On the other hand, building new and resilient infrastructure and fostering innovation will provide new economic opportunities in many countries. Investment in research and development gradually increased, and in 2014 comprised 1.7 per cent of GDP. Meanwhile, ODA for infrastructure increased rapidly, reaching \$57 billion in 2015, a 32 per cent increase in just the last 5 years.

When it comes to implementation, at the global level, there are some positive signs but also clear indications that a stronger commitment is needed for partnership and cooperation.

In 2016, official development assistance from member countries of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD totalled \$142.6 billion, 8.9 per cent higher in real terms than in 2015, reaching a new peak.

In 2016, Germany joined five other countries – Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom – in meeting the target to keep ODA at or about 0.7% of gross national income. Despite this progress, bilateral aid to the least developed countries fell by 3.9 per cent in real terms from 2015.

To ensure that sustainable development is realized by all people and for all people everywhere, a revitalized and enhanced global partnership that brings together all stakeholders and mobilizes all available resources is needed.

Excellencies,

Empowering vulnerable groups is critical to ending poverty and promoting prosperity for everyone, everywhere. In 2016, for instance, 15 per cent of young workers and their families lived in extreme poverty, compared to 9 per cent of adult workers. Moreover, youth were nearly three times more likely than adults to be unemployed. Exclusion extends to the disabled as well. In 2016, only 28 per cent of people with severe disabilities collected a disability pension.

While this report highlights the progress made and existing challenges for many of the goals and targets, the lack adequate data still makes it impossible to effectively monitor progress on many of the targets. Also, the lack of disaggregated data on vulnerable groups exacerbates their vulnerabilities by masking the extent of deprivation and disparities.

The global statistical community is working to modernize and strengthen statistical systems to provide a complete and accurate picture of how we are progressing and to allow us to make informed decisions in order to ensure that sustainable development becomes a reality for all people. That work is urgent and key to the success of the 2030 agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe that the evidence is clear. It shows us the direction we need to take.

Global, regional, national and sub-national or local efforts need to connect in a coherent way.

At every level, we need to start working across silos and with a long-term perspective.

We need institutions that are responsive and flexible. We need engagement of all stakeholders.

We need a clear and honest discussion of synergies and potential trade-offs.

We need to strengthen the science-policy interface: enhancing the role of science in policy making, implementation and monitoring; and promoting the generation and dissemination of innovations and technologies that help accelerate progress.

Over the coming days, the High Level Political Forum will present you with an unparalleled resource – access to the multi-faceted knowledge and expertise of participants from across the world, motivated by the desire to connect and make progress.

We will share experiences, learn from each other, pool our efforts, build partnerships and help guide policy.

I encourage you to contribute and also to make the most of this opportunity.

The HLPF is for review, follow-up and for implementation.

Let us work together to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs.

Thank you.

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