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**Introduction of the Secretary-General reports
on the ECOSOC themes
“Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality” and
“Long-term impact of current trends in the economic,
social and environmental areas on the realization of the Sustainable
Development Goals.”**

16 July 2019, Trusteeship Council Chamber

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to introduce two reports for the High-level segment of ECOSOC. General Assembly resolution [72/305 on ECOSOC strengthening](#) mandated these two reports.

The first one is on the theme “empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. It aims to identify policies and accelerators for addressing inclusiveness and equality building on synergies across the economic, social and environmental dimensions. It offers action-oriented recommendations to inform the discussions of the high-level segment.

The General Assembly resolution also mandated that the Economic and Social Council include, on the final day of its high-level segment, a debate on future trends and scenarios and the long-term impact of current

trends on the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. In support of the debate, a second Secretary-General's report on this topic was also prepared.

Regarding the first report, having concluded the thematic review that the High-level Political Forum undertook last week, and commencing the Ministerial Segment this week, we hope this report can add value to the follow-up and review process. It offers a more detailed review of what *equality, inclusion, and empowerment* means for the SDGs. It looks at how these concepts can be applied across the dimensions of sustainable development, to bring us closer to achieving the 2030 Agenda's transformative vision.

Excellencies,

The report emphasizes that inequality—like poverty—is a multidimensional phenomenon. It encompasses equality of means, opportunities, capacities and recognition. Inequality goes far beyond income inequality and relates to access to social services and various aspects of well-being.

Economic growth has thus masked growing inequalities on multiple levels in many countries. It has itself been uneven, widening gaps between the rich and the poor and between urban and rural areas.

On the other hand, *equality* can be defined as a foundational value of development and a non-negotiable ethical principle centred on a rights-based approach. In addition to an ethical imperative, achieving equality

has direct implications for the possibility of accelerating or slowing productivity and economic growth.

Equality, inclusion and empowerment are related to political participation. This is because impacts on decision-making processes determine the allocation and distribution of social, economic, political and cultural assets. From this perspective, the report emphasizes that participation is not just a fundamental right and a key dimension for social inclusion. It is also a highly important mechanism for strengthening democracy and transitioning to more egalitarian societies.

The inclusion of refugees in systems and economies is integral to reducing inequalities and transitioning towards inclusive and sustainable market economies. Comprehensive, pro-equality public policies based on social dialogue can address inequality as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon. Such policies must also be integrated into broader development frameworks that include investment promotion, access to finance, infrastructure investment and skills development.

The report also stresses the need to build strong institutional frameworks for the progressive realization of rights, and to deploy high-quality social policies that are effective, efficient, sustainable and transparent. Inclusive institutions in turn require well-established mechanisms for public participation. Those must go beyond electoral processes and seek the input of the public as critical for sustainable development.

Partnerships involving multiple actors are critical to identifying potential options and implementing the necessary actions. Access to

information is also necessary to ensure partnerships have a solid foundation and that decisions take on board public concerns.

Distinguished Delegates,

The report includes a section on frontier technologies, and how they can serve as both drivers and accelerators of development. Technology holds incredible promise for greater equality of opportunity and human welfare. But it also carries significant risks for human dignity, autonomy and privacy and the exercise of human rights.

The report looks at how technological innovation can support efforts to safeguard and restore the Earth’s critical ecosystems and biodiversity hotspots, while catalysing new economic opportunities and business models. It highlights how technology makes it possible to reach minorities and remote geographical areas, and open new avenues to reach out to the most vulnerable. It also examines how, in some instances, rapid technological changes are also found to contribute to widening income and wealth inequality.

Therefore, to deliver progress on the 2030 Agenda, it is imperative that technology-related policies integrate the social dimension. This is the only way for technology to promote empowerment and ensure equality.

Excellencies,

Let me now turn to the Secretary-General’s report on “Long-term impact of current trends in the economic, social and environmental areas on the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.”

This report emphasizes that policies to realize the SDGs can best succeed if they are rooted in solid evidence and data. And if they are informed by a thorough knowledge of the present situation and current trends, while also looking ahead and anticipating the effects of megatrends.

In this respect, the report identifies five megatrends that can have a significant impact on SDG implementation. Namely, demographic changes; urbanization; climate change; conflicts and protracted crises; and frontier technologies.

With regard to demographic changes, the report discusses the growing overall population, the ageing of societies and the rising migration flows. Within these trends, however, there are significant differences among regions and countries.

The concentration of population growth in the poorest countries will pose a serious challenge in eradicating poverty and hunger, reducing inequality, expanding access to education and health and overall ensuring that no one is left behind. An ageing workforce may also be challenged to keep up with the pace of innovation and structural changes in the labour market.

On the other hand, achieving orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, is a complex task, it significantly impacts ways to maximize the benefits and minimize any potential disruptive influence.

Policies dealing with these demographic changes cut across the SDGs on poverty eradication, health, gender equality, economic growth and

decent work, reducing inequalities and sustainable cities. These will need to be adopted in an integrated way to ensure that all these issues are considered when implementing the 2030 Agenda.

The second megatrend is urbanization. The report states that more than half of the world's population lives in cities, a proportion that is expected to rise. Growth of the urban population is driven by an overall population increase and by continued rural to urban migration.

Globally, cities have become economic and financial powerhouses, in part, due to economies of scale in urban agglomerations and lower unit costs of service provision, which generate prosperity. However, cities are also major contributors to climate change.

In the future, sustainable development will depend increasingly on the successful management of urban growth, especially in low-income and lower-middle-income countries where the most rapid urbanization is expected to occur.

For urbanization to be beneficial to all, policies must ensure access to infrastructure and social services for all, focusing on the needs of the urban poor and other vulnerable groups for housing, education, health care, decent work and a safe environment.

In parallel, well-managed urbanization should aim to improve the urban ecosystem and environmental services, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution and promote disaster risk reduction and management.

The third megatrend is climate change. The report recalls that human influence, primarily through greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel use – as well as deforestation and unsustainable agricultural practices – has been the dominant cause of the warming. Future climate-related risks depend on the rate, peak and duration of warming. The report also stresses that climate-related disasters have doubled since the 1990s.

Climate change is a global challenge. But its adverse impacts are distributed unevenly across countries and social groups, with poor and vulnerable social groups in developing countries being disproportionately affected.

Drivers of climate change are related to global population growth, increases in demand for food, water and energy and agricultural practices. Adaptation and mitigation are equally crucial.

Maintaining the status quo is not an option. It is important to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, explore circular economy. We must also bear in mind synergies and trade-offs when considering the adoption of mitigation and adaptation policies. We should aim for rapid implementation of ambitious greenhouse gas reduction measures.

Distinguished Delegates,

The fourth megatrend is conflicts and protracted crises. The report highlights that crises are generally driven by multiple factors and conditions that are often interlinked and interdependent. Overall global

peace continues to deteriorate with significant negative impact on economies and societies.

The impact of environmental factors is rising, putting additional stress on existing political, social and economic contributors to conflict. Water scarcity is also increasingly a trigger of conflict. In some communities, the raiding of livestock and destruction or stealing of crops is contributing to the cycle of violence. Furthermore, climate change is increasingly related to conflict in situations of existing institutional and socioeconomic fragility and political uncertainty.

Building the capacity of poor people, empowering them and promoting greater participation in decision-making and gender equality are critical to preventing conflict. Raising awareness of the adverse impacts of climate change on security is also essential. Local institutions have an important role in managing vulnerability and providing incentives to enhance resilience.

The last megatrend is frontier technologies. I would just underline once more that they hold tremendous potential for human well-being and environmental sustainability. Yet, at the same time, they threaten to outpace the ability of some societies and policymakers to adapt to the changes they create. Therefore, it is important to prepare societies for these changes.

Excellencies,

I hope both reports provide a starting point for deeper conversations around this year's theme and allow us to understand which actions can accelerate progress toward achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Thank you.