Ensuring that no one is left behind – How do we protect the poorest and most vulnerable from the crisis and empower them to realize the SDGs

High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
Statement by Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

The pandemic has set off a cascade of human rights disasters, of a scope and magnitude that we have rarely seen. It is reversing progress achieved in many countries and regions and pushing millions more people even further behind.

Unequal access to vaccines is killing people; generating new variants; and expanding the inequalities between and within countries. A two-speed economic recovery is a recovery that is not sustainable and will ultimately cause new disasters.

This is a moment for transformative leadership to build more equal and sustainable societies.

Human rights-based approaches to development are powerful tools that make us safer and more resilient. They place our emphasis on the people most at risk of discrimination. They are the best way to reduce inequalities and resume our path towards realising the 2030 Agenda.

Let me open up the tool-box:

- We need to vastly increase investment in social spending. The human rights to education, health, social protections and clean water are not ordinary services with a market-set price-tag. Access to affordable, quality services for all – including the poorest and furthest behind – is the bedrock of more peaceful, equal and successful societies.

- Even in a context of shrinking fiscal space, fighting corruption, reallocating resources and rethinking taxation can help to maximise resources for advancing a human rights economy – one that delivers access to health care, social protections, quality education, clean water, housing and other fundamental rights.
Human rights impact assessments and disaggregated data are key to a clear vision of policymaking. We cannot fix what we do not see.

All policy making should be grounded in meaningful participation, social dialogue, transparency and accountability. Every State needs the broadest possible civic space. This is the core of SDG16, which is essential to unlocking the 2030 Agenda.

A human rights-based approach to recovery also requires greater international cooperation and solidarity to keep people afloat and rebuild fairer. Universal and equitable access to vaccines is likely to be the strongest determinant of whether and how every State – and humanity overall – can control the pandemic.

And development financing and conditionalities should support, not undermine the capacity of every State to fund the human rights goals which keep people safe and well.

The Secretary-General's Call for Action for Human Rights summons all UN teams to place human rights at the heart of their support to States.

Our Office is committed to ensuring that this leads to better integrated, evidence-based country analysis; unified advocacy; and field programming that is better targeted, and more effective, because of its strong grounding in human rights.

Excellencies,

Inequalities stem from policy choices. They can – and should – be dismantled.

The High-Level Political Forum is uniquely charged with providing political guidance from the highest levels to ensure we deliver on the 2030 Agenda and shape a sustainable and just recovery from COVID-19.

This is challenging – but vital – work.

To be successful, we need to place human rights, including the right to development, at the core of our action.

Policies grounded on human rights that address inequalities and build social justice will develop stronger economies. They drive more inclusive political systems. They deepen trust. They help us reach those furthest behind. They build hope.

The Secretary-General's Call to Action asks the entire UN, and all States, to advance that vision of a new departure for our societies and economies, based on rights.
I look forward to intensifying our work together.