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**Mega trends in the High-Level segment of ECOSOC morning session on “Where are we heading? Visions and projections for the future of the SDGs”**

**Friday, 19 July 2019, ECOSOC Chamber**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Dear colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to address this High-level segment of ECOSOC and share some thoughts on the outlook for the Sustainable Development Goals as enshrined in the 2030 Agenda. Four years ago when leaders of the world came together to adopt the 2030 Agenda, the objective was very clear, to chart a true sustainable path to transform our society and protect our planet.

Over the past two weeks, we have come together to take stock of where we are on the implementation of the 17 universal Goals. Today, I would like to share a candid assessment of five major mega trends and risks shaping the SDGs. In this context, DESA prepared a short background document, entitled “Sustainable Development Outlook 2019: Gathering storms and silver linings”, to inform your discussion.

Excellencies,

The commitment to the SDGs remains strong. As has been made evident, we have made some headway towards realizing the Goals. The numerous Voluntary National Reviews that have been presented are but one example of the continuing commitment towards the 2030 Agenda.

And, while the challenges facing progress on the Goals are increasingly stronger, we must take full advantage of the opportunities that can accelerate their implementation. I will address both in my remarks, bearing in mind the importance of interlinkages – that progress in one area inevitably furthers progress in others.

Distinguished delegates,

As we know, robust and stable economic growth is a necessary condition – though not a sufficient one – for making progress on the Goals. It is unfortunate that economic growth now continues to face downward pressures. Nearly a decade after the 2008 global financial crisis, economic growth is yet to return to the pre-crisis level. According to the latest report of the United Nations World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP), the world gross product is now projected to grow by 2.7 per cent in 2019, and 2.9 per cent in 2020, marking a slowdown

from 2018. More concerning, GDP growth is projected to average around 3 per cent during the SDG period. This is nearly one percent below the global growth rate during the MDG period of 2000-2015.

Lingering trade tensions among large economies remain a major threat to global growth. There are also looming risks of sudden deterioration in financial conditions and elevated debt distress. Amid slowing global growth, prospects for eradicating extreme poverty remain dim. To counter these prospects, we must revive economic growth and boost much-needed investments in education, health, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and sustainable infrastructure.

Stronger international cooperation – similar to the strong international cooperation during the Global Financial Crisis – is a must for resuscitating global growth. At the same time, we need to look beyond GDP growth. It is time now, that we redefine economic performance in terms of how countries fare in reducing poverty, inequality and accelerating climate adaptation and mitigation. A new mindset is required.

Excellencies,

Nearly 1.8 billion people – one in three adults – will face chronic employment risks, including unemployment and vulnerable employment, or will remain outside the work force in 2030. Evidence shows that inequality and employment vulnerability are mutually reinforcing. And rising employment risks will only heighten insecurity and inequality. We cannot let this happen.

SDG 10 calls for reducing inequality. Yet, income inequality is rising. It is, however, not a universal phenomenon. In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, the Gini coefficient has declined in 17 out of 19 countries during the past twenty-five years. Inequality *among* countries has also trended downwards, thanks to strong economic performance of the East Asian economies. More than two thirds of the world's population are nevertheless experiencing rising income and wealth inequality.

Inequality matters for the SDGs in multiple ways. In the past, many policy-makers viewed rising income equality to achieve faster growth. However, new research shows rising inequality depresses growth. It also entrenches uncertainty and insecurity among people, reinforcing divisions and undermining trust in institutions and government.

Distinguished colleagues,

We must fulfil our promise to fight climate change. The recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change makes it clear that the world must act now. After slowing down in recent years, CO2 emissions are rising again. As is well known, the past four years have been the warmest four years on record.

The world continues to experience rising sea levels, extreme weather conditions and increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases. At the same time, both frequency and intensity of extreme weather events are on the rise. More than two billion people now live in countries experiencing high water stress – a slow-onset effect of climate change.

Developing countries—particularly Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the Least Developed Countries (LDC) that are least able to cope with climate change — are more vulnerable to climate risks. The human cost and economic damages as a share of GDP are significantly higher in developing countries than in the developed world. Average per capita emissions in high-income countries is 43 times higher than emissions per capita in low-income countries. And this is twice as high as the income inequality between rich and poor countries. As people in developing countries achieve greater economic prosperity, their per capita emissions will rise.

We need bold and urgent measures to decarbonize economic growth, cutting emissions by 45 per cent from their 2010 levels by 2030. We must transition to net negative emission growth, with new and updated nationally determined contributions (NDC) and scaled-up climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. This will require fundamental changes in the way we produce and consume. New pathways to development and prosperity must leverage technology—especially renewable energy technologies—to decarbonize economic growth.

Excellencies,

The trajectory of the global population will shape many of the SDGs. According to the UN's *World Population Prospects*, we will have around 8.5 billion people in 2030. Many developing countries will likely benefit from a demographic dividend that will potentially boost economic growth. For this to happen, however, we must ensure that employment growth keeps pace with population growth. Rising population also makes it an imperative – and an opportunity – to fundamentally transform current production and consumption patterns and enhance environmental sustainability.

The world's population is growing not only in size. It is also growing older. In 2018, for the first time in history, persons aged 65 or above outnumbered children under five years of age globally. The number of persons aged 80 years or over is projected to triple, from 143 million in 2019 to 426 million in 2050.

The ageing of the global population reflects our enormous success in reducing premature mortality. We must invest in healthy ageing, promote lifetime savings and increase social protections – at all ages – to ensure population ageing does not increase vulnerability and widen inequality.

By 2050, over two-thirds of humanity will live in urban areas. Sustainable urbanization – a key SDG – remains critical to ensuring that no one is left behind. It offers opportunities for expanding universal access to decent housing, health care and education for the growing number of urban dwellers. At the same time, we must incorporate climate mitigation and adaptation in urban planning and development, and create sustainable cities for the future.

International migration will continue to shape population dynamics. Rapid growth of populations in some regions, including in sub-Saharan Africa, will likely intensify migration pressures. Increasing intensity of floods, droughts and loss of arable land and livelihoods, as well as violence and conflicts, will further increase migration pressures.

International migration is almost always a win-win outcome that benefits both countries of origin and destination. Safe, orderly and regular migration remains an important option for escaping poverty and potentially also for adapting to climate change. Remittances sent home by migrant workers are important sources of financing to promote education, healthcare, entrepreneurship and social development in countries of origin.

Yet, opposition to international migration has been on the rise in a number of destination countries in recent years. The perceived fear of migrants taking away jobs, burdening the economy and spreading their cultural and religious practices is happening, despite the well-documented economic benefits of labour migration for host countries. We must make concerted efforts to strengthen the global governance of migration, as a means for accelerating progress toward the SDGs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We can have rapid technological change – a potential silver lining and a game-changer – on our side to counteract many of the SDG challenges I have outlined. While frontier and technological breakthroughs offer the best hope for achieving the SDGs, they cannot be taken for granted. Technologies can be – and often are – double-edged swords. We must make meticulous societal choices and guide technology in the right direction to deliver the common good.

We can leverage some of the new technologies to meet the most pressing needs of humanity. Food, shelter, health and energy securities are within our reach if we take advantage of the many technologies at our disposal. Renewable energy technologies, for example, can help us achieve many SDGs simultaneously:

- they can expand economic opportunities;
- create decent jobs;
- reduce CO2 emission;
- reverse global warming; and
- promote human development and reduce poverty and inequality.

Therefore, we must identify and prioritize a set of technologies that will be most critical for ensuring food, shelter, health and energy securities, and enhancing environmental sustainability. This is a must for bridging the technology divide that underpins the broader development divide.

Excellencies,

Multilateralism is critical to overcoming the challenges and exploiting opportunities to shore up the SDGs. Indeed, multilateral arrangements – from fostering trade to economic integration – have lifted more than a billion people above the poverty line over the past three decades. Yet, it cannot be taken for granted. As noted recently by the Secretary-General, strengthening multilateralism means strengthening our commitment to achieving the SDGs and building a safer, more just world for future generations. That commitment is needed now more than ever – from the United Nations and from leaders and citizens everywhere.

Distinguished delegates,

The Sustainable Development Goals are our shared commitment to build a world of dignity for all. The challenges we face today – rising inequality, climate change, increasing migration pressures and fast-paced technological change – demand a collective effort and a stronger multilateral response. As I noted in the beginning of my remarks, progress in one area inevitably furthers progress in others. We must show that multilateralism can deliver. Let us, together, make sustainable development a reality.

Thank you.

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