

24 September 2013

Text of Speech at the Inaugural Meeting of the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, “Building the Future We Want: from Rio+20 to the Post 2015 Development Agenda” United Nations Trusteeship Council Chamber

Gita Sen (on behalf of the Women’s Major Group)

President Ashe, President Osorio, Mr Secretary General, Madam President, Mr Prime Minister, Your Excellencies, Colleagues and Friends from the Major Groups and Civil Society, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I stand before you to speak on behalf of the Major Groups - and particularly the Women’s Major Group – groups that were set up after the 1992 Earth Summit to ensure civil society’s and social movements’ participation in decision making for sustainable development.

In all humility, I speak not *on behalf of* the women and girls of the world – who am I to represent the Afro-descendant girl with disability surviving in a favela, or the indigenous woman conserving her way of living in the mountains, or the dalit woman agricultural labourer struggling to feed her children in the presence of multiple discriminations and the impacts of climate change? But I do speak *from their perspectives*, the perspectives of half of the people of this world, the girls and women for too long subordinated and oppressed by patriarchal gender systems, burdened with work and responsibility but without the ability to make decisions or the freedom to make choices that affect all our lives.

We believe there are *four essential ingredients* to the sustainable development that we all seek:

First, sustainable development has important co-requisites that go beyond the environment to **the economic system** whose pressures can lead governments to destroy or sell out on natural capital including land and minerals as well as critical elements of the global commons. It needs well-regulated global and national financial systems along with investment, trade and financing regimes that protect the environment and promote human rights without being used to bolster unfair trade practices, protectionism or international arbitration that supersedes and erodes national laws and policy space.

The principles that should guide us include not only the precautionary principle and the principle of polluter pays, but also principles of equity and fairness as enshrined in the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, solidarity, and subsidiarity, as well as free, informed prior consent, and peaceful dispute settlement. Equity and redistribution are unavoidable today because we are so close to critical ecological limits.

Second, sustainable development is impossible unless **human rights** are at its centre.

These rights – universal, indivisible and interdependent – include our right to lives free from deprivation and with full recognition of the need for sustainable livelihoods; to the rule of law and freedom from violence including sexual violence and hate crimes on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity; and to bodily autonomy and integrity including our sexual and reproductive rights.

Without fulfillment of these rights, scores of millions of women and girls cannot complete their education, earn incomes, go safely through pregnancy and childbirth, or participate fully as citizens.

We are living in a world with the largest generation ever of young people: 1.8 billion. They need skills, education, and health; they must be supported to engage in this process by ending early marriages, investing in their education including comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health care, as well as protecting their human rights.

Third, civil society has become increasingly concerned about one of the most disturbing of recent trends – the growing influence and dependence of the multilateral system on private **corporate power**, including in the name of partnerships. Recent decades have shown us how anemic voluntary regulatory mechanisms and corporate social responsibility can be. The post 2015 agenda for sustainable development must have ‘sunshine’ clauses for transparency and clear mechanisms for open information, regulation and redress. Civil society views the HLPF as the central body to ensure accountability in this regard.

Fourth, in the words of our partners in the movements of people with disabilities: “**Nothing about us without us**”. Civil society and social movements are here and we will continue to be with you. We look forward to effective and robust participation in shaping the post 2015 development agenda.

Thank you.