

# **Remarks by Ambassador Elizabeth Cousens, U.S. Representative to ECOSOC, for the US/Canada/Israel Team, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the SDG Open Working Group, on a Proposal for SDGs**

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Thank you very much Mr. Co-Chair and thank you to Ambassador Kőrösi and all of your colleagues for helping to prepare this meeting. I have the honor to speak on behalf of our team of Canada, Israel and the United States.

First let me say, like others, we're very glad that we're now getting down to business. 2015 is really just around the corner and we want to take all the time that we can to discuss the issues in sufficient depth that we can craft an agenda that we'll all be proud of and will attract broad global support for the post-2015 world. I want to take you up on starting an injunction that we be interactive and really have a dialogue instead of statements, and focus my few remarks on what I understand to be today's task, which is to grapple with the conceptual issues surrounding our work. I will therefore reserve some specific comments on poverty to later in the meeting tomorrow or Friday.

On the conceptual challenges, let me address three main issues. They are not the only issues, but three main issues. First the scope, more or less what kinds of topics do we want the SDGs to cover? Second, the nature of the sustainable development goals – are they universal and what does that mean? Third, how do the SDGs relate to other processes?

I also want to say at the outset that I do not think that in this meeting we will be able to clarify every single aspect of the conceptual issues and that should be just fine. We need to clarify enough that we have a basis to proceed, but I would fully expect that in our meetings ahead we would circle back to these issues as a natural progress of our discussions unfolds.

So first on the scope of our goals. We are, as many colleagues who we have already heard this morning, of the belief that poverty eradication needs to be at the core of the SDG agenda. We also agree that we need to be more ambitious about what that means than

perhaps the MDGs were and also more comprehensive. That means greater attention to inequality, greater attention to exclusion, and the core drivers of poverty eradication and broader development objectives. We fully agree with what many G77 colleagues have said, that poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon and we need to reflect that in our attention to poverty. So, we are very glad that this second meeting is focused and starting on poverty as a foundational issue.

A second point about scope, we fully agree with colleagues that we need to give balanced attention to the three pillars of sustainable development. I think that it is self-evident that we all want to try to do that. In our view that doesn't mean something formal in that every goal has to have equal attention to different pillars or that there are certain numbers of goals that need to be attached to different pillars, but that whatever issues rise to the top of our collective priorities we address in a holistic and integrated way. We've heard colleagues speak about the need to be mutually reinforcing – our Indonesian colleague referenced that; the need to look at synergies – our Zambian colleague referenced that. I think we're all, more or less, trying to look for the same kind of more dynamic and integrated approach to the issues that command our attention.

A third point about scope, on the themes that do rise to the level of high priority: I think at Rio and generally, we all have a broad aspiration to be as ambitious as possible, as integrated as possible, and as comprehensive as possible. That obviously also carries risks that we will try to do too many things and therefore not be able to focus our minds and collective attention on those issues that really, truly command the highest priority for most countries most of the time, and particularly for the most vulnerable populations. And I think we have to be mindful of that risk. I've actually been very encouraged in what I've heard so far from a number of colleagues already this morning that there is quite a lot of commonality and themes that pop up recurrently. I am also encouraged by colleagues calling for attention and eventual articulation of goals that are limited in number, and as our Vietnamese colleagues said, simple, practical, and implementable. I think that was very helpful. We would take a very pragmatic approach to how one chooses themes – where we see the most common interests; where there is clear evidence that themes have the most impact on development gains, and in particular the eradication of poverty; and we are very attracted to our Singaporean colleague's suggestion about clustering issues as well. I think that was constructive way to approach it.

Next, we fully agree that goals need to be universal, they need to be relevant to all of us, we all need to have a stake, but clearly they also need to be articulated in a way that can be made relevant to and responsive to different national circumstances, national priorities, and so on. I think we will face tensions in how we try to do that as we go along in these

conversations and I don't think we can answer that ex ante. That's something we need to answer as we get into specific issues and look into more detail.

On the relationships between SDGs and other processes, I think we fully agree with colleagues that we need to ensure that whatever business of the MDGs is unfinished by 2015 needs to have a home – and a very clear home – in a follow-on framework. And we need to learn all of the lessons from the MDG experience. Especially looking at what we now understand to be the critical drivers of development gains and development outcomes. There are many ways to do that.

And then, very quickly, three final points.

It's important to remind ourselves that whatever goals we come out with aren't the entirety of the post-2015 agenda. There is a larger agenda that will include a narrative that may entail calls for action in other fora, it may entail other initiatives. I think the goals are an essential part of the post-2015 agenda but not the entirety of it and it's important for us to keep that in mind.

I would also encourage and welcome you and Ambassador Kőrösi in facilitating our discussions to help keep us focused on the immediate issues at hand in different stages of our agenda. And be as brutal as you need to be, including with me as my light is flashing.

Finally, I want to thank Under-Secretary General Wu and his colleagues for their very helpful papers. We acknowledge and welcome this as an intergovernmental process but we very much need all the inputs we can get from you, from civil society, from scientists and so on. And we won't do ourselves any favor if our own conversations do not take advantage of whatever good ideas and perspectives are out there to be tabled. So we really welcome your contribution as well.

Many thanks.

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