

# **Remarks by Ambassador David Roet, Israel Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, for the US and Israel, 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the SDG Open Working Group, on Promoting Equality, including Social Equity, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

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## AS DELIVERED

On behalf of the United States and Israel, I want to first of all thank both Co-Chairs for convening this meeting. I would also like to thank the panelists who fueled our discussions yesterday and today with important food for thought.

We have all heard the staggering statistics on inequality. Inequality is one of the defining challenges of our time and a pressing issue in every country. While we may all be born with the same rights, we have not always been born with the same opportunity, and that needs to change.

Globally, the world is wealthier than ever before, but not all people have benefited and many have been left behind. The fruits of development gains need to be accessible to all, and our future goal framework will therefore need to address inequalities in many dimensions. The big question is how? How do we apply the lessons learned from the MDGS? How can we most effectively address inequality in the SDGs? How do we ensure that no one is left behind?

We have heard calls for a number of approaches to integrating inequality into the post-2015 framework. We are interested in discussing these options further. Whichever we choose, we must address the multi-dimensionality of inequality, as well as the needs and views of the most vulnerable and excluded people, including women, children, youth, and the ageing. We also stress the importance of ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda. They represent 15% of the world's population and continue to face impediments to employment, education, and health and other basic aspirations.

Inequality is complex and requires attention to multiple issues, including the relationship between opportunity and outcome, and structural and other causes of inequality, including persistent discrimination. We must also look at the tools individuals need to be empowered actors and to be able to make choices about their future with a genuine sense of possibility.

Our discussions yesterday and today highlighted the importance of empowerment, and putting people at the center of our efforts. Investments in key areas are critical. These include, but are not limited to, access to fully inclusive education, quality and affordable healthcare, well-designed social protection floors, access to essential goods and services such as affordable and nutritious food and safe drinking water and sanitation as well as to financial services. Jobs with labor rights can also play an important role.

Our discussions have also highlighted the importance that inter-linkages will play. We will need to assess the most powerful way to integrate a commitment to inclusion and equality in our framework.

However we choose to address inequality its various forms in the SDGs, one thing is certain — we need to arrive at a post-2015 development agenda that reflects a common commitment to raise the floor and ensure that all individuals, no matter how vulnerable or excluded, can truly enjoy in development gains. This is a universal challenge to which we all must rise.

One of the most persistent forms of inequality is, of course, the profound inequality that women and girls around the world continue to face.

Evidence shows that, despite significant progress in access to education and some progress in health outcomes, women continue to lag in terms of access to jobs and livelihoods. Inequalities between women and men, and boys and girls, are evident in all areas of life, in every country, in both the public and private spheres. We have all heard the statistics, and in the interest of time, I will not repeat them.

We see gender equality and the empowerment of women as essential to sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda.

We cannot imagine a post-2015 development agenda that does not include the equality and empowerment of women and girls as one of its central goals as well as integrate gender-specific targets in other relevant goals. There are a number of targets that could support a stand-alone goal, including eliminating early child and

forced marriage, combatting sexual and gender-based violence, and promoting women's political participation and leadership. We urge that early child and forced marriage also be discussed in the context of the priority of gender-based violence.

Additionally, the integration of gender into other relevant goals reflects the reality that gender inequalities contribute to the delay of progress in almost every sector.

We consider gender equality and empowerment of women to be inextricably linked to promoting and protecting the human rights of all women, including their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health. Women – indeed young girls, as we heard so powerfully yesterday from Dr. Babatunde -- still die every day due to preventable childbirth and pregnancy-related problems—and this is unacceptable. Empowering women to control their own reproductive decisions, including determining the number, timing and spacing of their children is essential to reducing maternal and child mortality and enables women to participate fully in their families, professions and communities.

Access to quality education for women and girls, including comprehensive sexuality education, as well as skills and entrepreneurship training, are key to achieving women's economic empowerment. And we all know that the fruits of this economic independence are often almost entirely re-invested in their children and their families. Education is also an important tool to encourage men and boys to be fully involved in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

The specific needs of rural women also need to be addressed. Despite overall declines in maternal mortality, women in rural areas are still up to three times more likely to die while giving birth than women living in urban centres.

And this brings me to my last point—the importance of disaggregated data. Disaggregation of data will be essential to know whether we are focusing on the most vulnerable and most importantly whether we in any of our contexts are succeeding. Birth registration is an important aspect of this as disaggregated data collection must rely on vital statistics that count all people, without discrimination. If we look at women and girls, many of them are made even more vulnerable by the intersection of gender with other characteristics including disability status, ethnicity, religion, age, whether they live in an urban or rural setting. This will allow for more accurate monitoring and ultimately, better results.

Finally, we welcome the joint statement that will be delivered by Argentina on behalf of Mozambique, Finland and many other countries.

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