**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

**--**

**REMARKS TO THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM**

**New York, 21 July 2025**

**[all-English]**

This year’s High-Level Political Forum arrives at a time of profound challenge – but also real possibility.

Despite enormous headwinds, we have seen just in the last two months what can be achieved when countries come together with conviction and focus.

We saw it in Geneva, where the World Health Assembly adopted the Pandemic Agreement -- a vital step toward a safer, more equitable global health architecture.

We saw it in Nice at the Third UN Ocean Conference, where governments committed to expand marine protected areas and tackle plastic pollution and illegal fishing.

And we saw it in Sevilla at the Fourth International Financing for Development Conference, where countries agreed on a new vision for global finance -- one that expands fiscal space, lowers the cost of capital, and ensures developing countries have a stronger voice and participation in the organizations that shape their future.

These are not isolated wins.

They are signs of momentum.

Signs that multilateralism can deliver.

Signs that transformation is not only necessary -- it is possible.

And that is the spirit we bring to this High-Level Political Forum.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

This Forum is about renewing our common promise -- to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all.

We also recognize the deep linkages between development and peace.

We meet against the backdrop of global conflicts that are pushing the Sustainable Development Goals further out of reach.

That’s why we must keep working for peace in the Middle East.

Over the weekend in Gaza, we saw yet more mass shootings and killings of people seeking UN aid for their families – an atrocious and inhumane act which I utterly condemn.

We need an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the immediate release of all hostages, and unimpeded humanitarian access as a first step to achieve the two-State solution.

We need the ceasefire between Iran and Israel to hold.

We need a just and lasting peace in Ukraine based on the UN Charter, international law and UN resolutions.

We need an end to the horror and bloodshed in Sudan.

And the list goes on, from the DRC to Somalia, from the Sahel to Myanmar.

At every step, we know sustainable peace requires sustainable development.

The Sustainable Development Goals are not a dream.

They are a plan.

A plan to keep our promises — to the most vulnerable people, to each other, and to future generations.

People win when we channel our energy into development.

Since 2015, millions more people have access to electricity, clean cooking, and the internet.

Social protection now reaches over half the world’s population -- up from just a quarter a decade ago.

More girls are completing school.

Child marriage is declining.

Women’s representation is growing — from the boardrooms of business to the halls of political power.

But we must face a tough reality:

Only 35 per cent of SDG targets are on track or making moderate progress.

Nearly half are moving too slowly.

And 18 per cent are going backwards.

Meanwhile, the global economy is slowing.

Trade tensions are rising.

Inequalities are growing.

Aid budgets are being decimated while military spending soars.

And mistrust, division and outright conflicts are placing the international problem-solving system under unprecedented strain.

We cannot sugarcoat these facts. But we must not surrender to them either.

The SDGs are still within reach -- if we act with urgency and ambition.

This year’s Forum focuses on five critical Goals: health, gender equality, decent work, life below water, and global partnerships.

All are essential. All are interconnected. All can spur change across other goals.

On health, COVID-19 exposed and deepened inequalities – and today, far too many people still lack access to basic care.

We know what works.

We must boost investment in universal health coverage, rooted in strong primary care and prevention, reaching those furthest behind first.

On gender equality, gaps remain wide.

Women and girls face systemic barriers -- from violence and discrimination to unpaid care and limited political voice.

But we also see growing momentum: from grassroots movements to national reforms.

Now is the time to turn that momentum into transformation -- with rights-based policies, accountability, and real financing into programmes that support inclusion and equality for women and girls.

On decent work, the global economy is leaving billions behind.

Over 2 billion people are in informal jobs. Youth unemployment is stubbornly high.

But we have tools to change this.

The Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection is helping countries invest in expanded social protection initiatives, skills training, and the creation of sustainable livelihoods — including in growing industries like clean energy.

Tomorrow, I will deliver an address on the enormous opportunities of the renewables revolution.

The upcoming World Summit on Social Development can help spur further progress.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

On life below water, our ocean and the communities that count on it are paying the price of overfishing, pollution, and climate change.

We must deliver on the commitments of the Nice Ocean Conference -- to protect marine ecosystems and support the millions who depend on them.

And, finally, on global partnerships -- SDG 17 -- we need to strengthen all the elements that can support progress.

This means investing in science, data, and local capacity.

And harnessing digital innovation — including artificial intelligence — to accelerate progress, not deepen divides.

Throughout, we must recognize the need to reform the unfair global financial system, which no longer represents today’s world or the challenges faced by developing countries.

We must ensure a reform for developing countries to have a stronger voice and greater participation to help advance the Sustainable Development Goals on the ground.

The Sevilla Commitment that emerged from the Conference on Financing for Development includes important steps:

Through new domestic and global commitments that can channel public and private finance to the areas of greatest need.

By increasing the capacity of governments to substantially mobilize domestic resources, including through tax reform.

And by establishing a more effective framework for debt relief and tripling the lending capacity of multilateral development banks to the benefit of developing countries.

Excellencies,

In the coming year, we must keep building.

We must strengthen and scale up partnerships that deliver — including with the private sector and civil society organizations and local authorities.

We must embed long-term thinking into every decision, as we committed in the Declaration on Future Generations.

And we must continue to learn from each other.

Voluntary National Reviews -- the backbone of this Forum -- are more than reports.

They are acts of accountability.

They are journeys of self-discovery as countries develop and build.

And they are templates for other countries to follow and learn from.

By the end of this HLPF, we will have surpassed 400 reviews -- with over 150 countries presenting more than once.

That is a powerful signal of commitment.

A clear demonstration that solutions exist and can be replicated and expanded.

With five years left, it’s time to transform these sparks of transformation into a blaze of progress — for all countries.

Let us act with determination, justice and direction.

And let’s deliver on development — for people and for planet.

Thank you.