



**INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION  
STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL, MS JAN BEAGLE**

**SDG 16 CONFERENCE**

**TRANSFORMING GOVERNANCE FOR A MORE PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE FUTURE:**

**SDG 16 AS THE ROADMAP TO RESPOND TO COVID-19 AND BUILD BACK BETTER**

**Closing Remarks**

30 April 2021

Ambassador Marrapodi  
Assistant Secretary-General Spatolisano  
Colleagues and Friends

It is a pleasure to join you again as we come towards the end of the Second SDG 16 Conference.

Over the last three days we examined our shared fragility, looked at ways to renew the social contract and explored how to turn challenges into opportunities.

There was consensus that even before the pandemic, the world was not on track to achieve SDG 16 and the 2030 Agenda. And COVID-19 threatens to set us back significantly.

Pre-existing challenges, including increased poverty and inequality, growing fragility and insecurity, and a lack of trust in governments and institutions, have magnified the impact of the crisis and hampered response and recovery efforts.

But, perhaps most importantly, we agreed that COVID-19 is a wake-up call.

By exposing our vulnerability and lack of preparedness for crises, it has the potential to shock the world into action.

It is clear that the principles of rule of law, human rights, and democratic governance that form the core of SDG 16, and cut across the 2030 Agenda, must guide our efforts.

As Dr. Tedros reminded us, in the time of COVID-19, “good governance can be the difference between life and death.”

We have heard experiences and examples of good practices at local, national, regional and international levels that can help guide the way forward.

Some clear themes were evident across the three days:

First, “leaving no one behind” and “reaching the furthest behind first” are essential.

COVID-19 is redefining the concept of vulnerability.

As we have seen, no one is entirely immune to the devastating impact of the pandemic, but the most severely affected are those already living in conditions of poverty and exclusion.

The impact on women and girls and on young people has threatened to roll back decades of hard-won gains.

Fragile and conflict-affected contexts have been hard hit, with the potential to create persistent islands of poverty and insecurity.

Ensuring that no one is left behind in the recovery requires a rights-based approach to social protection and access to public services.

The rule of law is key to tackling the multiple intersecting and overlapping layers of discrimination, and empowering people to claim their rights.

And women must be included at all levels of decision making, and their perspectives and needs fully taken into account in response and recovery.

Second, to rebuild trust we need to make laws and institutions work for people.

The justice gap can only be narrowed if legal systems are reoriented towards justice for all, and not just the few.

A people-centred approach is needed to empower justice seekers and to promote fairer and more satisfactory outcomes.

Corruption is a growing driver of discontent and a challenge to sustainable development. We need to combat it through improved prevention, detection and prosecution to increase effectiveness and public trust.

Third, innovation is essential.

Technology can be a great equalizer and a catalyst for transformative change.

But we must improve our understanding of the needs of people living in conditions of vulnerability and exclusion, and ensure equitable access, to avoid further widening the digital divide.

Lastly, success requires collective action and whole of society approaches.

The challenge is ultimately one of leadership – and we all need to do our part.

This conference is proof that each of us brings something unique to the table.

Governments shared innovative policy measures, and responses based on data and science.

Multilateral institutions highlighted new frameworks for addressing fragility, strengthening prevention, and building resilience.

Civil society representatives showcased good practices at the grassroots level – from improving the accountability of local government to providing virtual legal assistance.

Young leaders demonstrated the importance of engaging and empowering youth – through intergenerational dialogue, increased representation and greater access to opportunity.

It is clear that a renewed commitment to cooperation and solidarity, centered around the 2030 Agenda, is needed to tackle challenges that are too big and too complex for any of us to solve alone.

It is in this spirit that we organised this Conference.

I would like to thank all of you – our distinguished speakers and our engaged and energised participants – for taking time to discuss these crucial issues.

I would also like to express my renewed appreciation to our host, the Government of Italy, and to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for their continued partnership and support for SDG 16.

We now look ahead to sharing your insights in the deliberations of the High-Level Political Forum and beyond, and even more importantly to put them into practice, as we seek to accelerate progress towards SDG 16 and the 2030 Agenda.

Justice lies at the heart of what makes development inclusive and sustainable.

Just yesterday, for example, Germany’s constitutional court ruled that national laws to tackle climate change are “partly unconstitutional” because the targets place an unfair burden on future generations.

Empowered citizens, and effective laws and institutions, have a critical role to play in rebuilding trust, renewing the social contract, and building societies that are more resilient in the face of crises like COVID-19.

As part of our contribution to this collective effort, IDLO is launching a “roadmap for a rule of law-based recovery,” which sets out eight priority actions to help guide the way to a more peaceful, just and inclusive future.

Getting there will not be easy. Building a culture of justice requires sustained commitment.

But it is the best investment we can make in our collective future.

Thank you.