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Opening Panel of the Rome Conference on SDG 16, hosted by Italy, IDLO and UN DESA

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*Introduction*

- Allow me to first thank Italy, IDLO and UN DESA for convening this important SDG16 conference at this critical time.
- Great to have such diversity of participants, it will help us enriching our knowledge and finding a way forward to better address SDG 16.
- Jan, you refer to the crisis and ask why we should invest in SDG 16. This is because the pandemic, the crisis, has precisely exposed and widened inequalities, exacerbated injustices, and contributed to a wave of protests and unrest.
- It has also led to a new crisis of trust between governments and people, and it has in many instances contributed to eroding the social contract.
- This conference is therefore very timely as it is more urgent than ever to work to **promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies**.
- In my remarks today, I will focus on the justice pillar of SDG 16.

*The Need for People-Centered Justice*

- Prior to the pandemic, as The Netherlands, we were part of a Justice Task Force to promote SDG 16.3. The Justice Task Force report identified a justice gap worldwide of at least 1.5 billion people who could not solve their justice problems.
- The report concluded that many justice systems are not fit for purpose to address people's justice needs.
- With the pandemic, the justice gap has only grown. For example, think of all the justice problems related to employment, debt, and bankruptcy. On top of that, the world has also seen an increase in human rights violations and domestic violence.
- We know from data produced by World Justice Project and OECD that these justice problems, if not resolved, incur costs in other sectors. They can also have impact on the mental well-being of individuals and communities and give rise to grievances and conflict. In short, these justice problems can further erode the social contract.
- The pandemic also creates opportunities. It allows us to conceive of justice in a new way.
- Justice ought to be a part of the global response that seeks to build stronger societies going forward. It is not about expensive and lengthy solutions, but it is about accessible, affordable and fair solutions.
- Many of these solutions can come at a local level. Take for example the organization STER in Nigeria. STER stands for Stand to End Rape. It is a youth-led social enterprise, which advocates against sexual violence, provides prevention mechanisms, and supports survivors with psychosocial services. Its website states: “*We are*

*working towards the day when rape is part of history, rather than part of our everyday lives.”*

- It is such initiatives – grounded in the local context - that we should collectively be promoting.

#### *The Ministerial*

- So, to give a new impulse to the justice agenda, the Netherlands organized a Ministerial meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, together with the Elders, the g7+ for fragile and conflict-affected states, and the Pathfinders of the Center for International Cooperation at NYU, with participation of Ministers from 14 countries, including Justice Ministers and Development Ministers.
- This meeting was encouraging - never before did I hear so many different Ministers endorse the concept of people-centered justice and speak to the urgency of finding solutions to the justice challenges exacerbated by the pandemic.
- This demonstrates clear political will for collective action and collaboration going forward.
- The meeting addressed a letter to the Secretary General of the UN urging him to include people-centered justice in the Common Agenda.
- The letter states that “*transforming justice, by putting people at the center, is key to reviving the bonds that hold our societies together, and to re-establishing trust between people and communities, and governments.*”
- For those of you who want to see the letter, we will place a link to the letter in the chat function of this meeting.

#### *Justice Action Coalition*

- The meeting also launched a **Justice Action Coalition** – a platform of collaboration to continue to translate ideas into action during the pandemic and beyond.
- This Coalition will provide a space for those who want to join forces to further the justice theme as part of the SDG 16 agenda.
- The Coalition will be composed of countries, organizations, and individuals, and all those present today are invited to participate. No formal membership is required as it should function as a **community of practice**, coordinated by the Pathfinders.
- The Coalition will focus on specific themes and promote people-centered justice domestically and internationally, mobilizing political and financial support, and will exchange experiences and set out a common research agenda for people-centered justice.
- In this way, it will seek to impact on the ground, to make people-centered justice a reality.

#### *Conclusion*

- In conclusion, we look forward to collaborate with all of you on this topic and the Justice Action Coalition.
- As we start to look ahead to a period beyond the pandemic, restoring trust and the wellbeing of individuals and communities through justice will be critical to advancing SDG 16.

- Let us use gatherings like today to align our actions, to exchange ideas and to learn from pertinent local examples, such as STER in Nigeria.
- Those are the voices we need to listen to. This is where we learn about solutions that address the needs of people.
- Thank you again for your attention.