

**Closing Remarks by  
Ms. Maria Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary-General for  
Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs  
SDG 16 conference 2022  
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Excellency, Mr. Fabio Cassese, Director General for Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation,

Director General of the International Development Law Organization, Ms. Jan Beagle,

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

We have reached the end of the SDG 16 Conference 2022 on “People-centred governance in a post-pandemic world”. This has been a very engaging and rich event, with participants joining online from different continents, and many who managed to come to the beautiful city of Rome. I thank all speakers and participants for their insights and contributions to the discussions and deliberations.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the Government of Italy for hosting the Conference here for the second time. I would like to thank the International Development Law Organization for partnering again with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in the organization of this event.

I would like to acknowledge the participation of civil society during these two days, and their work to update the Rome civil society declaration on SDG 16. Engaging with all the SDG 16+ stakeholders is key to any meeting that looks at ways forward on the issues that the Conference has examined, and I am glad that the hybrid format allowed us to do so this year.

We just heard several important messages that resonated through the past two days. I will not repeat them. For those of you who followed the previous edition of the Conference, it must be

clear that there is continuity in what we heard. This should not come as a surprise. The challenges facing peace, justice and inclusive societies have not gone away. Many of the messages included in the outcome of last year's Conference remain fully relevant – not the least because the pandemic did not disappear.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to leave you with a few thoughts that were triggered by the various interventions:

First, the four dimensions that the Conference has examined: peace, the rule of law, robust institutions and leaving no one behind – are not independent. The examples we heard throughout these two days have shown how challenges in one of those areas can quickly spill over to the three others. For instance, the existence of conflict makes leaving no one behind more difficult to achieve. Gaps in the rule of law foster corruption. Lack of access to justice directly results in leaving whole parts of society behind. This interconnectedness was made very clear, thanks to the multi-disciplinary backgrounds of the speakers. So, while promising avenues have to be pursued in each of those areas, a holistic perspective is needed at all times to ensure that the other areas are kept in sight. This, in itself, is a formidable challenge - for international and national institutions alike.

Second, in spite of all the innovations that have taken place over the world to allow critical sectors such as health and education to continue to function during the pandemic, we should not be complacent. Millions of children and students were not able to access quality education, in spite of digital solutions. In some countries, health systems have been pressured to the breaking point. Gender equality and women's empowerment have suffered setbacks. We should not look at these and other negative impacts of the pandemic as short-term "problems" in need of a fix; they have fundamentally altered the development trajectory of many countries, and will be felt for years, perhaps decades. We are looking at a different world, and have to adapt our efforts to this new reality.

Similarly, we should be worried that in spite of the known importance of relying on evidence and data, enhancing coordination across government agencies, increasing the preparedness of public institutions for crises, and communicating appropriately with the public in times of emergencies, the record of countries' responses to the pandemic has been mixed. Calling for more of the same will, obviously, not suffice.

Third, it seems clear that solutions to institutional challenges at the national level have to adjust to rapidly changing national contexts. For instance, countries that were seen as examples to follow based on their responses to the first waves of COVID-19 have sometimes struggled to contain later waves. Rapid changes in societies' tolerance for constraint, trust in their government, and level of hardship felt by the people, among many other factors, may have rendered response strategies less effective over time. Such evolutions are highly context-specific; this should be a call for humility and prudence.

Fourth, the theme of engagement with non-governmental actors in responses to COVID was recurrent. We heard about the importance of engaging civil society, specific groups of the population, women and girls, the youth, in efforts to sustain peace, to increase transparency and accountability, and to make societies more inclusive. This is undoubtedly an area where much has been learned during the past two years, and where many innovations can be transferred to the next normal.

To conclude, let me state again that SDG 16 in all its dimensions is a fundamental underpinning of sustainable development. It will be instrumental to efforts by all stakeholders to shape post-pandemic strategies and policies while recovering the ground lost on other SDGs, and to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.

I am looking forward to the outcome of this Conference informing the high-level political forum on sustainable development next July. Beyond this, I hope that the discussions at the Conference will have provided food for thought to all of you, and that you will be able to translate them into concrete policies and actions at all the relevant levels.

Thank you.