

STATEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION

GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

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Delivered by Irene Khan, IDLO Director-General

Vice Minister Del Re
Ambassador Hilale (Vice-President of ECOSOC)
Under-Secretary General Liu Zhenmin
Ambassador Belloni,
Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,
Friends and Colleagues,

On behalf of the International Development Law Organization, let me welcome you to the Global Conference on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies.

It has been a great privilege to work with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and I would like to thank Under-Secretary General Liu for giving us this opportunity to do so. We are all grateful to Italy for its generous and valuable support without which this Conference would not have happened.

The purpose of this Conference, as you know, is to prepare for the review of Goal 16 at the High-Level Political Forum in New York in July. During the next three days we will assess the progress that has been made, identify the challenges encountered, draw out common themes from diverse country experiences and develop some key messages to convey to the High-Level Political Forum.

The review of SDG 16 is taking place against a somber background of deteriorating social, economic and political conditions, marked by an increasing number of States affected by fragility and armed conflicts, large-scale humanitarian crises, slowing economic growth, rising inequalities, intolerance and social tensions, increasing pressure on international norms, standards and human rights, attacks on the independence of the judiciary and on civil society.

While these factors affect all Sustainable Development Goals, they pose particularly serious challenges to Goal 16, given its ambition of achieving peaceful, just and inclusive societies. That creates a strong imperative for all stakeholders – governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental – to intensify their attention, effort and investment to advance the implementation of Goal 16.

As we consider that challenge, allow me to make three key points:

My first point is about the crucial role that SDG 16 plays in making the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Agenda a truly transformative one. Leaving no one behind is a fundamental measure of success of the 2030 Agenda. That overriding objective cannot be achieved

without the reduction of violence and insecurity that trap people in poverty; without access to justice for all that would protect people's rights; or without effective and accountable institutions that promote and sustain development against shocks and setbacks.

That is why peaceful, inclusive societies, access to justice and effective, accountable institutions – the three pillars of Goal 16 - are the critical link in the sustainable development chain. That's what makes the 2030 Agenda transformative and Goal 16 an integral part of the transformation.

Goal 16 covers a wide spectrum of targets - from eradicating violence, corruption and bribery to promoting the rule of law, from providing legal identity and access to information to fighting organized crime and illicit arms and financial flows. The common thread is inclusive, effective governance that promotes justice for all.

Not only are the three pillars of Goal 16 inter-linked and mutually reinforcing, the Goal itself is a critical enabler of other Sustainable Development Goals and so inter-connected to them.

To give some examples of how Goal 16 enables other Goals: access to justice empowers the poor and marginalized to claim their rights – for instance to land that improves their food security (Goal 2) or protection from sexual and gender-based violence that advances women's empowerment and gender equality (SDG 5). Access to information encourages transparency in governance and reduces corruption. The chances of obtaining clean water (SDG 6) improve when there is clean government. Without the rule of law, business cannot flourish (SDG 8). Without legal identity, children may be denied health care (SDG 3) or education (SDG4).

Rooting sustainable development in a culture of justice and inclusion makes the world a fairer, more inclusive, and safer place. That is what is so transformative about Goal 16.

My second point is one of concern that, far from unleashing its transformative power, Goal 16 is making slow and uneven progress, or worse still, retrogressing on some aspects. The Report of the Taskforce on Justice has found that some five billion people – or two thirds of the world's population – have no meaningful access to justice. It is not the first or the only report to have pointed out that millions of people in the world do not have enough confidence in the police or courts to report violent crime or seek redress for land, family or commercial disputes. Perception surveys show high levels of corruption are eroding public trust in institutions, undermining public services and holding back social and economic development. Even where there has been progress, for instance on laws on right to information, they are not being implemented effectively, or birth registration where a lot still remains to be done in some parts of the world.

This lack of progress is not just disappointing for all that Goal 16 offers and has failed to achieve. Given the cross-cutting nature of Goal 16, the failure to make significant progress also creates a risk that implementation of other Goals might fall behind, distorting the achievements of the 2030 Agenda.

My third and final point is that this Conference can make sure that it need not be so. Internationally, coalitions of governments, international organizations and civil society are mobilizing around SDG 16. At the country level, too, champions of justice and the rule of law are rallying together, determined to break the nexus between insecurity, exclusion, injustice and poor governance. IDLO is proud to be part of that mobilization.

As an organization that is exclusively devoted to advancing the rule of law and access to justice, we know from our experience in countries as varied as Kenya, Afghanistan, Liberia, Ukraine, Mali and Honduras, that just as there are challenges, there are also some remarkable stories of success, innovation and transformation that need to be furthered and scaled up.

Building effective institutions, ensuring access to justice takes time, effort and will. But the return on investment is significant. The moral case is evident. The business case is even more compelling. For instance, the Report of the High-level Group on Justice for Women which IDLO co-convened with UN Women and the World Bank found that output losses associated with current levels of gender discrimination represent 16% of the global GDP or 12 trillion US dollars! Imagine what resources would be created, how much would be achieved, how many lives of women and their families would be transformed when SDG 5 and SDG 16 are successfully implemented in a coherent and coordinated way!

Working together we can harness once again the same energy, commitment and tenacity that successfully propelled SDG 16 on to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development four years ago. Let's reinforce commitments, encourage local ownership, mobilize resources and reinvigorate concerted action as we move towards the High-Level Political Forum.

Meaningful progress on Goal 16 requires political commitment, time and money. It is the best investment we can make to accelerate progress across the entire 2030 Agenda.

Let me end by recalling, as I did in my statement at the SDG Summit in 2015, the icon for Goal 16. The dove of peace stands on the gavel of justice. Peace, progress and sustainability are built on the foundations of justice. Let us build those foundations of justice.

Thank you.

The International Development Law Organization (IDLO) enables governments and empowers people to reform laws and strengthen institutions to promote peace, justice, sustainable development and economic opportunity.