

- building inclusive and sustainable societies;
- investing in social cohesion and ending all forms of exclusion, discrimination and racism;
- establishing a new generation of social protection;
- providing access to education for all and harnessing digital technology; and
- guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for women and girls as we ensure the centrality of human rights in all we do -- in line with my Call to Action on Human Rights.

At the international level, a New Global Deal should renew the spirit of the United Nations Charter and revive trust among Nations.

A New Global Deal must be founded on a fair globalization, based on the rights and dignity of every human being, on living in balance with nature, and on our responsibilities to future generations. It should bridge huge gaps in governance structure and ethical frameworks and ensure that global political and economic systems deliver on critical global public goods. Together, let us pledge to build solutions that are fair, build resilience and leave no one behind.

That concludes the message of the Secretary-General.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to welcome you to the 2021 SDG 16 conference on “Transforming Governance for a more Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Future: SDG 16 as the roadmap to respond to COVID-19 and build back better”.

I wish to thank the government of Italy for making this Conference happen. I also thank the International Development Law Organization for partnering with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN DESA, to organize it.

I am pleased to see that many leaders from governments, international organizations, civil society and academia have joined us. At the heart of this conference is the relationship between COVID-19 and Sustainable Development Goal 16. Understanding this multi-faceted relationship is critical to an inclusive and sustainable recovery from the pandemic.

Unfortunately, however, progress across the various dimensions of SDG 16 has been uneven. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated many of the worrying trends.

For example, the pandemic has created major disruptions to the functioning of governments as a whole. Restrictions and social distancing measures have challenged the working methods and processes of parliaments and courts, creating obstacles for the regular conduct of business. This can further undermine legislative oversight and law-making, limiting judicial enforcement, and affecting citizens' access to justice.

The disruptions have further challenged institutional arrangements that enable government departments and levels to work together to foster policy integration, and to engage with non-State actors.

At the same time, the pandemic has elevated the risks – as governments implement responses to the crisis – to accountability and integrity, including through greater opportunities for fraud and corruption. These risks further impact the delivery of the SDGs.

Distinguished Participants,

These challenges make effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions more important than ever.

At the same time, they reveal the potential for improvement in cross-cutting dimensions of government action, such as:

- crisis preparedness,
- science-policy interface,
- communication, and
- the use of digital government, which are important determinants of governments' capacity to manage crises.

To this end, SDG 16 is vital, and can help to accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, key principles – such as effectiveness, transparency, accountability and inclusiveness – can strengthen the capacity of societies to withstand shocks and recover better. This will be critical as we recover from the crisis.

Without a doubt, however, major challenges lie ahead, which this conference will explore. As we move forward in these efforts, I would like to highlight two critical functions:

First, the role of public institutions and public servants.

The responses to the pandemic have shown that it is necessary and possible for public institutions and public administrations to play a proactive, leading role. In spite of the extreme challenges, public institutions and public servants have responded forcefully to the crisis. They have adapted by:

- leveraging and redeploying human resources,
- devising new ways to keep delivering public services on the ground, and
- adapting administrative processes to allow for speed and flexibility.

Second, the role of digital government.

A defining feature of the pandemic period has been the reliance on digital technologies, and the use of digital government tools. Digital procedures were adopted by public institutions such as parliaments, to continue to function during the pandemic. Governments, often in collaboration with non-State actors, have deployed an impressive range of digital solutions in response to the pandemic.

These have included:

- contact tracing,
- social distancing and virus tracking,
- information sharing,
- health, education, e-business, and
- working and learning from home.

Indeed, the pandemic spurred many governments to accelerate digitization of administrative processes and public services. However, the widening digital divide, and threats to privacy, security, and unethical use of information and misinformation, remain a reality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Less than nine years remain before the end date for the Sustainable Development Goals. Making progress on SDG16 is not only needed to achieve the SDGs; it is a requirement for a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the pandemic.

This conference represents a unique opportunity to make progress in this direction. I look forward to the discussions and to your conclusions.

I thank you. *****