

H.E. Ms. Dessima Williams
On behalf of the President of the General Assembly

Opening Remarks at the Global Sustainable Transport Conference
Ashgabat, 26 November 2016

Your Excellency, President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov,
Mr Secretary-General,
Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to deliver this statement today on behalf of the President of 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly, H.E. Peter Thomson.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Turkmenistan for hosting this conference and I regret that I am unable to participate in person at this meeting due to prior commitments.

Just over two months ago, I made a solemn commitment to the members of the General Assembly to do all in my power to strengthen momentum around implementation of each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals during my term in office.

I did so because, in my view, these goals capture the essence of what we need to transition to a more sustainable and just world.

They represent a once in a generation opportunity to bring an end to the scourge of poverty, exclusion and discrimination; to deliver peace in larger freedom; and to give all people a fair path to prosperous and fulfilling lives.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals represent perhaps our final chance to bend the curve on climate change, to save our people and our planet from a future of destruction, scarcity and conflict by embracing a green economy that is good for both society and environment.

Sustainable transport is absolutely central to seizing this opportunity and I congratulate the Secretary-General for taking this timely initiative.

Sustainable Transport is a key development component for all countries and all regions; for the achievement of each of the SDGs; for delivering a new urban reality and fulfilling the Paris Climate Change Agreement.

Sustainable Transport is about ensuring people everywhere have access to what they need most: jobs, markets and goods, social interaction, education, and a full range of other services.

It is about fuelling our way of life in a manner that is energy efficient and environmentally sustainable.

It is a lifeline, in particular for countries in special situations—for landlocked countries and for Small Island Developing States that are far removed from the major hubs of international trade.

The question for all of us here today is how we get from where we are now to where we need to be?

And how do we do this before it is too late – both for those who are currently being left behind, and for the good health of our planet?

The Analysis and Policy Recommendations report from the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport is a strong contribution in this regard.

It points the way to addressing rising challenges, particularly in urban areas, allowing us to see opportunities that sustainable transport can make possible.

Addressing these challenges will require bold and farsighted policy along with planning and investment decisions based on the three dimensions of sustainable development.

It will require effective and efficient infrastructure, that, in many countries—especially developing countries—is sorely lacking today.

Experts estimate that USD \$90 trillion is needed for investment into energy, transport and urbanization over the next 15 years to change that reality, with two-thirds of that going to developing countries.

This will demand a combination of public and private investment, with public investment used strategically to help crowd-in or leverage further private investment.

Of course building urban and transport infrastructure is not enough — it must be sustainable infrastructure, particularly because of the locked-in, long-term nature of infrastructure investments and it must be climate resilient.

This dual focus will compound the benefits of infrastructure investment — allowing us to mitigate climate change and the pollution and congestion factors that plague cities.

Excellencies, the sustainable transport revolution will only happen with all actors on board.

We must ensure, for example, that the global public and especially our young people, see the SDGs as both rights and responsibilities; and that individuals and societies accept the SDGs as the best path towards attaining sustainability.

We must also work to activate partnerships and align all relevant stakeholder in the universal and integrated pursuit of the SDGs – the UN system, international financial institutions, multilateral bodies, regulatory authorities, the private sector, local authorities, civil society, academia, the youth and people everywhere.

As President of the General Assembly, I am calling upon all stakeholders – globally, regionally, nationally and at community levels – to use opportunities like this conference to come together around concrete plans and concrete initiatives for SDG action and in this case the development of sustainable transport.

In April, I intend to host a dedicated meeting on financing at UN HQ in New York with a specific focus on how different regulatory schemes and financial instruments can be adapted to fund crucial SDGs sectors such as infrastructure and transport.

And in June, the UN Conference on Oceans in New York will be a tipping point for the international community to drive global climate action and the universal effort needed to return our oceans to health, a topic that should also be of strong interest to those active in marine transportation.

I hope that you will lend your expertise and your commitment to the transformation our world needs – for human dignity, peace, prosperity and sustainability.

There is no time to lose.

I thank you.