

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS AT OPENING OF THE MINISTERIAL SEGMENT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL New York, 14 July 2020

Madam President of the Economic and Social Council,
Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Madam Prime Minister of Finland,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Last September, the General Assembly proclaimed a Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals.

That was in response to a deeply concerning reality – the world was not on track to deliver the Goals by 2030.

Today, as the High-Level Political Forum meets to review progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, our world is in turmoil.

We were already facing many challenges -- unacceptably high levels of poverty; a rapidly worsening climate emergency; persistent gender inequality; and massive gaps in financing.

Today, we face another massive global challenge -- COVID-19.

The gravity of the crisis should not be lost on anyone.

More than 12 million people have been infected by the virus; over 550,000 have died.

Working hours equivalent to some 400 million jobs were lost in the second quarter of 2020.

We are experiencing the sharpest decline in per capita income since 1870.

Between 70 and 100 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty.

Some 265 million people could face acute food insecurity by year's end – double the number at risk before the crisis.

And the impacts of this pandemic are falling disproportionately on the most vulnerable.

At a time when we desperately need to leap ahead, COVID-19 could set us back years and even decades, leaving countries with massive fiscal and growth challenges.

The crisis is taking us further away from the SDGs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am not here today to tell you that everything will be OK.

We need to be honest with ourselves.

The COVID-19 crisis is having devastating impacts because of our past and present failures.

Because we have yet to take the SDGs seriously.

Because we have put up with inequalities within and between countries that leave billions of people just one crisis away from poverty and financial ruin.

Because we haven't invested adequately in resilience – in universal health coverage; quality education; social protection; safe water and sanitation.

Because we have yet to right the power imbalances that leave women and girls to constantly bear the brunt of any crisis.

Because we haven't heeded warnings about the damage that we are inflicting on our natural environment.

Because of the shocking risks we are taking with climate disruption.

And because we have undervalued effective international cooperation and solidarity.

But we can turn this around.

With the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, we have an enduring and unifying vision; a framework to guide our decisions as we look to respond and recover better.

I am encouraged also by the tremendous response to the crisis since it hit, from governments, international partners, our Resident Coordinators and the entire UN development system as well as from heroes in the health system and in communities around the world.

And with the voices of young people, the activism of civil society; the power of innovation and the agility of business, we have the makings of a global movement for good.

From the awakening that this crisis is providing, we have a chance to create an inclusive, networked and effective multilateralism.

We can also break from the damaging assumptions and approaches of the past -- from how we work to how we learn; where we live to what we consume – and take great leaps forward in doing so.

And finally, in the decisions on financing that will be taken over the coming months, we have an opportunity to safeguard recent gains, protect the most vulnerable and move towards more inclusive, sustainable and resilient societies.

I have been calling for a rescue package amounting to 10 per cent of the global economy, and mechanisms of solidarity to ensure that the developing world can benefit.

I will continue to push this effort forward in September, in full cooperation with Member States.

Excellencies,

I commend the 47 countries that are presenting voluntary national reviews this year, despite difficult circumstances.

Their reports confirm that our challenges have become greater and more pressing, as COVID-19 has exacerbated the world's fragilities.

Now we must rise to meet the moment.

We all recognize that the world cannot go back to the previous so-called normal.

We need concrete, bold and implementable solutions inspired by the Sustainable Development Goals.

Let us use this High-Level Political Forum to take the full measure of the crisis faced by all countries and give particular attention to those with already limited economic resources.

Let us share experiences – understand what works, and what can be replicated or taken to greater scale.

And let us renew our determination to enact a multilateral response that gears recovery efforts towards the SDGs.

Your deliberations today and in the coming days can help turn the tide globally.

Thank you.

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