

Opening Remarks by

Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

**2020 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
Special Event “SDG Acceleration Actions to Build Back Better”**

Tuesday, 14 July 2020, 8:00 – 8:50 a.m. (EST)

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

All countries across the world – big and small, rich and poor – are seeing daunting challenges to their sustainable development efforts drastically compounded by the ongoing multidimensional human crisis – the first of its kind in the 75-year history of the United Nations.

As countries struggle to respond to, and recover from, the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical to ensure that we aim to emerge stronger. We must build back better, greener and fairer. People should be put at the center of all our recovery efforts.

We have a shared blueprint for action – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are our ‘policy vaccine’ for the worst effects of COVID-19.

Excellencies,

Over the past months, my Department (DESA) has been advancing analytical work to build evidence and offer policy insights on the multiple impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on our societies and economies. I would like to highlight three key priorities that would enable us to build back better:

First, we should maintain past progress made towards eradicating basic deprivations. We need to continuously support those at immediate risk of poverty, hunger or disease, while facilitating their safe return to work and education as well as their access to health care. This point is especially crucial to build resilience and prevent further setbacks.

Second, we must accelerate the universal provision of essential services to all. Guaranteed access to quality healthcare, education, basic income security, as well as to water, sanitation, clean energy and internet, especially for the most vulnerable populations, should become an integral part of recovery process.

Third, we should reverse course on the degradation of nature, including in greenhouse gas emissions, land degradation and biodiversity loss. The present crisis is a chance for us to build back in a more sustainable way.

Distinguished participants,

In the lead up to 2019 SDG Summit, my Department set up an online knowledge platform to galvanize and capture new and ambitious “SDG Acceleration Actions” undertaken by governments and all other non-state actors. We are pleased to have been working closely with all the Regional Commissions around collaborative evidence-building and advocacy.

As of today, over 170 bold, game-changing commitments and initiatives, aimed at advancing the Decade of Action for the SDGs, have been published.

Building on a plurality of approaches, these SDG Acceleration Actions reflect diverse country and sectoral realities, as well as regional dynamics and perspectives. Many respond to the global pandemic and put different means of implementation to work, including capacity-building, development cooperation, multi-stakeholder partnerships and technology development and transfer, to enhance their scale and scope.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During these extraordinary times, we need more SDG Acceleration Actions that are responsive to new local realities and conducive to the advancement of more resilient and sustainable solutions.

This morning, I look forward to hearing examples of SDG Acceleration Actions from across the globe – the stories of the bold, the stories of the unwavering, the stories of the ingenious.

Every engine needs a spark to accelerate.

I wish all of us a fruitful meeting

Thank you.