

OPENING REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC, SERGIO MATTARELLA, AT THE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE “PEACE, JUSTICE AND INSTITUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”

Your Excellency, Madam Deputy-Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Your Excellency, Under-Secretary-General United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs,

Your Excellency, Madam Director-General of the International Development Law Organization,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to open today’s conference on “Peace, Justice and Institutions for Sustainable Development”, dedicated to SDG 16 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

I thank the UN Authorities and the International Development Law Organization for working on this event, which is taking place for the first time here in New York, following the previous editions held in Italy.

I would like to welcome all the participants, governments’ representatives, international organizations, judiciary institutions, academia, civil society, including the youth and women in particular, committed to promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, fair judicial systems and effective, accountable and transparent institutions.

Peace, inclusion, justice are the cornerstones of sustainable development for every country and every society and I like to underline how they are also fundamental principles of the Italian constitutional system.

The existence of a system of protections and legal safeguards is a pre-condition for the fulfilment of personal rights and, indeed, for human development, understood in its highest meaning.

The same foundational principles are reaffirmed in the United Nations Charter itself, which, already in its preamble, establishes the commitment “to paving the way to the upholding of justice and the respect of obligations deriving from treaties and other sources of international law” and “to promoting social progress and a higher standard of living in a context of increased freedoms”.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda, with its Sustainable Development Goals, deserves recognition for setting out a concrete horizon for their attainment, and for laying out a roadmap to which all Member States have subscribed, in the interest of their peoples. This entails first and foremost protecting our planet, the place they inhabit.

As we touch the second half of the Agenda’s implementation timetable, a significant acceleration towards the achievement of our common objectives is essential, as it was reaffirmed last September, during the last UN Summit on this topic.

Unfortunately, we find ourselves in a more complex landscape than we imagined some time ago.

Intensifying climate change's negative effects add up to the proliferation of dramatic conflicts that take us further away from our commitment to prioritizing the agenda.

The consequences are devastating: as of now, only a very low percentage of the 2030 Agenda's objectives could be achieved within the agreed timeframe.

The work that falls upon this preparatory Conference is invaluable, as it was the case for the previous editions in Rome, in particular ahead of the "Summit for the Future", scheduled for next September.

The legal framework that decides whether the objectives of the Agenda can be pursued is an essential tool.

Relying exclusively on the actors' good will has often proven to be delusive.

This is why the SDG16, at the core of today's discussion, represents and entails a crucial step.

How could we talk about peace as development if not by upholding the rights of individuals and peoples?

How could we, if not by enacting, in conflicts, the humanitarian law principles sanctioned in the Geneva Conventions, which are today openly violated?

If not by implementing regulations and initiatives to protect the condition of women against violence against children and women, against exploitation by organized crime, against the marginalization of disabled people?

These are issues that closely affect the institutions and justice.

The ultimate goal is to end the insecurity to which too many peoples and too many individuals are forced.

With regard to this topic, it was a great honor for us to sponsor a Resolution that the General Assembly approved just over a month ago and that 24 years since the Palermo Convention, has declared November 15th, the "International Day for the prevention and fight against all forms of transnational organized crime", as a tribute to Italian Judge Giovanni Falcone.

The very stability of States, the rule of law, are far too often undermined by pervasive crime.

These issues require urgent attention, so we need to work to make our societies more cohesive and just, expanding the civic and political spaces of participation so as to include all components of societies. We need to make institutions, at every level, more inclusive and more representative: ultimately strengthening the "social contract" between peoples and institutions.

These are the prerequisites for the development of the person, unfortunately fragile or absent in many parts of the world.

This is also why Italy is firmly committed to advancing the implementation of this objective and to collaborating to this end with organizations such as Idlo, which is headquartered in Rome.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Peace and development's fate is intertwined.

There cannot be peace without development, and vice versa.

We live at times with the highest number of conflicts since the end of the Second World War. They derail a huge number of resources to the arms race, stealing them away from development.

The call to build the conditions needed for peace and to put an end to conflicts could not be more necessary and urgent.

Today, we are faced with another danger that undermines citizens' trust in the institutions and between countries, disinformation.

Last Friday, we celebrated World Press Freedom Day, which every year reminds us of the importance of freedom of information to preserve democracy.

Topics such as access to information, freedom of expression, protection of privacy legitimately fall under the goals included in SDG 16, the topic of today's discussion.

With – and within – the United Nations we must work to rebuild trust between nations, strengthen international cooperation and forge new networks to foster understanding and collaboration.

Italy acts upon these convictions, with firm resolve in supporting the instruments of dialogue based on the principle of multilateralism which today is so dramatically challenged by the Russian aggression against Ukraine and by the consequences of the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We cannot shape intrastate relations based on nineteenth-century ideals and legacies, moved by the urge for power.

The call for change comes from citizens, young people and women, as they see the future inspired by the objectives that the 2030 Agenda has outlined.

Animated by this hope, I wish you all the best success with today's discussion.