



# SDG 16 CONFERENCE

Peace, Justice & Inclusive Societies



Peace, justice and  
inclusive societies for  
sustainable development

## SDG 16 High-Level Conference Report 2024

New York, 6 May 2024





## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>The Conference</b> .....   | 1  |
| <b>Key messages</b> .....   | 3  |
| <b>High-level opening and closing segments</b> .....  | 8  |
| <b>Session 1:</b> Promoting peaceful societies for sustainable development.....   | 11 |
| <b>Session 2:</b> Promoting the rule of law, equal access to justice, and the fight against corruption and organized crime..... | 14 |
| <b>Session 3:</b> Developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels in support of the SDGs .....     | 17 |
| <b>Session 4:</b> Building more inclusive societies for all.....  | 21 |
| <b>Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+</b> .....   | 24 |

## The Conference



The 2024 SDG 16 High-Level Conference addressed the theme “Peace, justice and inclusive societies for sustainable development”. With an eye towards addressing intersecting global crises, the Conference provided a multi-stakeholder platform for engagement on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, fostered the sharing of experiences and identified action-oriented recommendations on how to accelerate progress towards SDG 16 as a critical enabler of the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).

Held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 6 May, and co-organized by the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and the International Development Law Organization (IDLO), the Conference brought together a range of panellists and participants, including ministers and senior government officials, heads of United Nations system entities and other international organizations, and representatives of civil society, youth, and academia to address the following themes:

- Promoting peaceful societies for sustainable development;
- Promoting the rule of law, equal access to justice and the fight against corruption and organized crime;
- Developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions; and
- Building more inclusive societies for all.

Building on the outcomes of the [2019](#), [2021](#), [2022](#) and [2023](#) editions, the 2024 Conference served to inform the review of SDG 16 at the 2024 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in July. Conference deliberations aim to support the in-depth review of SDG 16 and its interlinkages with the other SDGs under review at HLPF, as well as inform other intergovernmental processes, including the Summit of the Future in September 2024.

Setting the scene for the Conference deliberations, the opening session featured special addresses by the President of the Republic of Italy and the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, as well as remarks by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs of UN DESA and the Director-General of IDLO. At the closing session, the President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) expressed her hope that the Conference deliberations will inform the Ministerial Declaration of HLPF.

The Conference was structured around four panel sessions, and included a dedicated civil society track which resulted in the updated [2024 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+](#).

The Conference featured more than 30 speakers, gathered more than 300 in-person participants and was webcasted on UN Web TV. More than 20 countries delivered statements, including on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Rule of Law, the Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform and the Justice Action Coalition.

## Key messages

Across the four themes addressed by the Conference, speakers and participants highlighted the following insights on SDG 16's catalytic effect in addressing some of the most significant crises facing the world today and accelerating progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

1. SDG 16 is a critical enabler of all the Sustainable Development Goals and is at the heart of what makes the 2030 Agenda transformative. It enables synergies across the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and provides a practical roadmap for tackling multiple global intersecting crises, including conflicts and climate change, and reinforcing confidence in public institutions. Progress on SDG 16 would accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda and the other SDGs, on peace and human rights.
2. The world is experiencing the greatest number of conflicts since 1945, exacting a heavy toll in human suffering, jeopardizing peace and development gains. Addressing root causes of conflicts such as inequalities, impunity, and breakdowns in the rule of law can help prevent conflicts and build resilience. There are also tangible economic benefits to conflict prevention, since every dollar spent on prevention can result in 16 dollars in savings on emergency responses. The multidimensional nature of violence requires whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to prevention, resolution and reconciliation processes at local, national, regional and international levels. The interdependence between peace and sustainable development was emphasized. More work is needed to ensure policy and operational linkages between the Peace and Security, the Sustainable Development and the Humanitarian Agendas, in line with nexuses and other integrated approaches (such as the Humanitarian-Peace-Development nexus, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda; Climate, Peace and Security; Peacebuilding and sustaining peace).
3. The compounding effects of intersecting global crises are closely correlated to a global decline in the rule of law. Strengthening the rule of law at global, national and local levels can help rebuild trust, catalyze progress across the 2030 Agenda and tackle challenges such as conflicts and climate change. When the legal system operates fairly and impartially, it promotes public confidence in governance, leads to greater civic engagement and creates an enabling environment for sustainable development. There is a need for fair, effective, and equitable mechanisms to address complex, transnational challenges such as climate change that pose significant obstacles to peace and sustainable development.
4. People-centred justice approaches are key to ensuring that justice systems are based on a better understanding of peoples' needs and leave no one behind. People-centred justice should be sustained by effective and transparent institutions and based on the rule of law.

Justice systems should be data-driven and evidence-based, ensuring the effective deployment of resources while also investing in innovative and effective service delivery. They should focus also on the sub-national level and on the use of the diverse pathways to justice with a focus on improved outcomes for the end users. Legal empowerment is a key asset, especially for the most vulnerable people. Positive actions are needed to ensure that those have the tools and knowledge they need to claim their rights, access justice, participate in decision-making, and gain trust.

5. Corruption hampers the provision of public services, undermines trust in public institutions, threatens peace and security and thwarts sustainable development. Building on existing instruments, such as the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, is critical to ensure that public resources are effectively spent and promote greater transparency, accountability, and integrity at national and international levels. Judicial institutions, in partnership with other parts of government, oversight institutions and civil society can play an important role in the fight against corruption. Ensuring the independence and integrity of justice institutions must be a priority.
6. Transparency is needed to build trust and foster equitable societies. Robust accountability systems are critical, including strong checks and balances as well as transparency and civic accountability mechanisms. The role of oversight institutions is crucial. Parliaments are key parts of national accountability systems. They need to be adequately resourced and effectively collaborate with other oversight bodies. Independent media, human rights defenders and civil society in general are key to promoting accountability.
7. Digitalization is a critical transformational driver that can either improve or worsen inequalities. In harnessing new technology, being mindful of digital divides is necessary in order to bridge the significant gap between current practices and the objective to leave no one behind. Digital transformation needs to be based on the promotion of human rights, and people need to have a voice in shaping its trajectory and participating in digital governance. Inclusivity should be at the core of artificial intelligence governance. Current developments must not lead to a digital ecosystem that replicates and exacerbates exclusion and biases or creates new forms of inequality. Ethical guardrails are essential to mitigate risks and fully exploit advantages of artificial intelligence and digital transformations. Digital technologies have to be properly regulated. This requires robust laws and policies, privacy rights, complaint mechanisms, regular independent audits, and strong regulatory enforcement.
8. The commitment to protect access to information enshrined in SDG 16 must be upheld. There is a need to promote access to reliable information, including for young people and marginalized social groups. Misinformation and disinformation are a growing source of instability and conflict and must be urgently addressed, including through regulation. The current state of play gives disproportionate visibility to divisive content. Transparency is

key to progressing in this area. As a first step, content platforms should be legally required to disclose their content moderation policies and the algorithms they use. There is a need for standards of publication of public information. Governments should consider frameworks for open data.

9. Democratic and accountable institutions are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda and are the engine for the acceleration of the Agenda and all its SDGs. Reinforcing confidence in governance and public institutions is essential to further strengthen their action and requires consistent commitment and genuine efforts to understand and address people's concerns and aspirations. Public institutions must be strengthened to make them more inclusive and responsive to people's needs. This requires efforts to build the capacities of public servants, including civil servants' knowledge of human rights and their skills in anticipatory planning, policy-design, and policy-implementation. Access to the public service must all be fully inclusive, including through proactive policies of non-discrimination. Work is needed to improve administrative systems and make them more efficient, transparent, and easily accessible to the public, including through the use of technology.
10. Progress on SDG 16 is indivisibly linked to progress across the 2030 Agenda. SDG 16 can catalyze transformative and gender-responsive actions throughout the whole spectrum of public policies, including in the context of the other SDGs under review during this year's High-Level Political Forum (SDG 1, 2, 13, 17) and beyond. It is important to engage across sectors to strengthen these interlinkages and develop innovative approaches in areas such as climate justice and inclusive economic development.
11. A key ingredient of trust between people and their Governments is the equitable and efficient management and spending of public resources. Budget credibility – whether Governments implement budgets as planned – is a key indicator in this regard. It is important to work with reformers within government to enhance budget transparency and accountability. Other parts of national accountability ecosystems need to be involved, including supreme audit institutions. To restore trust in public institutions, it is important for civil society, grassroots organizations and groups that have been marginalized to engage with budget matters. The use of innovative models of governance can help to scale up service delivery and maximize efficiency.
12. Progress on SDG 16 requires whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. All levels of governments must work in collaboration and synergy, including local authorities which play an important role in implementing and localizing the Sustainable Development Goals. Multi-stakeholder mechanisms such as national commissions on sustainable development have enabled inclusive approaches in some countries. Multisectoral, multidisciplinary partnerships, including with the private sector can help to build trust, pool resources, and promote innovation. A central challenge is to ensure active and meaningful participation of people at all levels in elections and beyond, including through



mechanisms such as participatory budgeting and citizen assemblies. Investing in the leadership and participation of women and youth in public life is key, and proactive actions must be taken by institutions to ensure inclusion, space and non-discrimination. Civil society, in particular, is critical to holding decision-makers accountable, including by fostering transparency and accountability. Governments need to take a stand against shrinking civic space and protect freedom of expression, freedom of association, as well as the rights of activists, journalists, and independent media.

13. We need to continue to emphasize the principle of leaving no one behind. Inclusivity fosters trust and stability. Fostering social cohesion is critical and requires approaches that strive to include all segments of society, including women and girls, young people, Indigenous Peoples, people with disability and other groups that have been marginalized. Governments need to ensure that access to resources is exempt from discrimination based on gender, religion, or other socio-economic factors. Policies need to reflect the needs of vulnerable and minority groups, including through addressing inherent structural inequalities and intersectional disadvantages. Failing to represent these groups in data narratives leads to policies that fail to address or even worsen the challenges they face. Promoting the inclusion of marginalized groups in society requires broad approaches such as social justice programmes, social audits, community engagement, the use of technology to reach disadvantaged communities, and innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships.
14. Gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls is both a human right and a prerequisite for peace and sustainable development. It is crucial to increase women's representation in all public institutions, including parliaments, and elevate their role in all stages of decision-making, including as related to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and justice. Innovative approaches to empowerment are needed to address socio-economic disparities, for instance in promoting women's financial inclusion and entrepreneurship and supporting women's organizations, including digital platforms. Gains in these areas often yield broader benefits that extend to reduced gender-based violence. Better gender-disaggregated data are needed to understand and address gender imbalances, and in turn to reduce interpersonal violence, improve women's access to justice, and enable transformative climate and environmental action.
15. To achieve the 2030 Agenda, the leadership, creativity, and capacity of young people should be fully mobilized. Enabling and facilitating youth leadership helps to avoid perpetuating antiquated, inadequate models. Young people bring new perspectives and solutions. They are crafting policies and are pioneering technological innovation. It offers promise for achieving intergenerational peace, justice, and sustainable development, and for securing human rights for future generations. The participation of young people and children is key, including in the context of the United Nations settings and processes. Meaningful engagement and participation require true opportunities that leverage young people's agency, and the willingness of Governments to invest, to listen and act upon what they hear. Governments also need to engage with young people and their priorities in a

conducive manner. We must address the range of issues that threaten youth engagement in building peaceful societies, such as lack of access to education, health, and social services, limited political space, financial barriers, discrimination, organized crime, and human trafficking.

16. As domestic budgets and development assistance come under increasing pressure from a growing number of crises and an uncertain economic environment, it is important to advocate for increased political and financial support for SDG 16. Peace, justice, and good governance must be kept high on the international agenda, including by leveraging multilateral processes, such as the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the Summit of the Future, and the International Conference on Financing for Development to generate support for SDG 16 and the entire 2030 Agenda.

## High-level opening and closing segments



The Conference was opened by the President of the Republic of Italy, H. E. Mr. Sergio Mattarella. He emphasized the “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”. He also underlined the need “to make institutions, at every level, more inclusive and more representative: ultimately strengthening the “social contract” between peoples and institutions.”

H. E. Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, underscored that the positive impacts of SDG 16 must reach where they are needed most. “SDG 16 is not only critical to the success of the 2030 Agenda, it is also critical to achieving the right to development, upon which economic, social, political, and cultural advancement of all people depends”, she said. She also highlighted that looking around the world today, we see these ideals grow more distant by the day, with conflict and violence being rampant and women and children bearing the brunt.

SDG 16 is both a stand-alone goal and an enabler and accelerator of all other SDGs. It is at the heart of what makes the 2030 Agenda transformative and has a vital role in addressing multiple global crises, including conflict, lack of trust in public institutions and climate change.

To address these challenges, Mr. Li Junhua, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, urged participants to prevent conflict and advance cooperation and confidence between people and Governments. He noted: “I encourage you, in your exchanges, to explore strategies for addressing the root causes of conflicts, preventing and reducing violence and promoting inclusivity, to pave the way for more peaceful societies.” He also welcomed participants’ “perspective on opportunities for building more inclusive societies that support trust among people and between people and their institutions”.

Ms. Jan Beagle, Director-General of IDLO, further highlighted the role of SDG 16 as a framework to advance key whole-of-society approaches to sustainable development. She explained how “SDG 16 can help ensure fairness, accountability, and transparency, giving people confidence that institutions are working in the interests of all, rather than a privileged few.” “People-centered justice systems protect the rights of the least powerful and empower them to participate in decision-making,” she highlighted.

Speaking at the closing of the Conference, H. E. Paula Narváez, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations and President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, noted the imperative to carefully consider the interlinkages across the various dimensions of SDG 16 that matter for effective policymaking in order to deliver society-wide change. She emphasized the need for comprehensive, holistic approaches that encompass legal reforms, effective enforcement, and collaboration across multiple institutions and multiple levels of government; the need to work at the level of societal norms to promote integrity, transparency and accountability; and the need to engage with women, youth, and civil society.

## **Quotes from speakers**

*“Peace, inclusion, justice are the cornerstones of sustainable development for every country and every society.”*

**H. E. Mr. Sergio Mattarella, President of the Republic of Italy**

*“The rule of law is the common thread in the fabric of the Charter of the United Nations and what binds together its three pillars of peace, security, human rights and development. Without this common thread, SDG 16’s vision of a sustainable, secure, inclusive and peaceful future is impossible.”*

**H. E. Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations**

*“Across the whole spectrum of Goal 16, we need to change gears. As with other goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, working in silos cannot deliver society-wide change. We need to carefully consider the interlinkages across the various dimensions of SDG 16 that matter for effective policy-making.”*

**H.E. Ms. Paula Narváez, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations and President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council**

*“SDG 16 is foundational to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, however, progress on this Goal has been inconsistent and unsatisfactory at best. As shown by the last Sustainable Development Goals Report, urgent action is needed to change course.”*

**Mr. Li Junhua, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, UN DESA**

*“SDG 16 is a critical enabler of all seventeen Sustainable Development Goals and is at the heart of what makes the 2030 Agenda transformative. At its core lie rule of law, human rights and good governance - fundamental principles that underpin peace and sustainable development.”*

**Ms. Jan Beagle, Director-General, International Development Law Organization (IDLO)**

## Session 1: Promoting peaceful societies for sustainable development



The world is experiencing the greatest number of conflicts since 1945, exacting a heavy toll in human suffering and putting development gains in jeopardy. Violations of international humanitarian and human rights law are occurring in many parts of the world, leading to humanitarian crises of unprecedented scale. These crises disproportionately affect marginalized and vulnerable groups, including women and children, who often bear the brunt of violent conflict. They face heightened risks of exploitation, abuse and neglect, which exacerbates their already precarious situations.

In this context, investing in SDG 16 and the rule of law is crucial for maintaining peace and justice. Proactively addressing root causes such as inequalities, impunity, and breakdowns in the rule of law can help prevent conflicts and build resilience. This approach also makes economic sense.

Estimates by the United Nations and the World Bank indicate that every dollar spent on conflict prevention can save sixteen dollars in emergency response and reconstruction. Existing conflicts should be resolved through dialogue, mediation, and peacebuilding initiatives according to the Charter of the United Nations. Moreover, strengthening institutions and promoting good governance are crucial for building resilient societies capable of withstanding and recovering from conflicts. This can also provide an enabling environment for inclusive economic development, by attracting investment, generating economic opportunities, and lifting people out of poverty.

Empowering women and ensuring their equal participation in all spheres of life – political, economic, and social – can significantly contribute to preventing and resolving conflicts. Women’s involvement in peace processes can lead to more durable and effective solutions. Similarly, protecting children and providing them with opportunities to thrive is essential, as they represent the future of peaceful societies. Ensuring that children have access to legal identity, healthcare, education, social protection, adequate living standards, as well as access to justice, is crucial for their development and the stability of societies.

People-centred justice systems are fundamental to creating more peaceful societies. Such systems ensure fair, equitable and accessible avenues for resolving disputes, thereby upholding the rule of law. When laws are applied fairly and consistently, they protect the rights of all individuals and promote a culture of respect and accountability. Transparent, efficient, and responsive justice systems can rebuild trust in institutions and the rule of law, which is essential for breaking the cycle of violence that holds back the development potential of countries and individuals.

The multidimensional nature of violence requires whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to prevention, resolution and reconciliation processes at local, national, regional and international levels. Governments, civil society, the private sector, and international organizations must work together, leveraging their unique strengths and perspectives. Such multistakeholder partnerships should promote the meaningful participation of women, young people, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups. Inclusivity is key to empowering communities, fostering greater trust and stability, and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Multilateralism and international cooperation are essential for effectively addressing conflicts, as they bring together diverse perspectives, resources, and expertise from around the globe. Multilateral efforts reinforce the commitment to international laws and norms, fostering a global environment of mutual trust and cooperation, which is crucial for maintaining long-term peace and stability.

## **Quotes from speakers**

*“SDG 16 is a cornerstone of sustainable development, emphasizing the rule of law, access to justice and accountable institutions. [...] Cognizant of this critical nexus between peace and development, SDG 16 is not only a fundamental prerequisite for progress but also an enabler of all other SDGs.”*

**H. E. Amb. Sarah Safyn Fyneah, Permanent Representative of Liberia to the United Nations**

*“SDG 16 plays, as we know, a crucial role in the peace, security and development nexus. It serves as a fundamental pillar in the integrated framework that recognizes that peace, justice and strong institutions are interrelated and essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.”*

**H. E. Amb. Pedro Comissário Afonso, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Mozambique to the United Nations and President of the Security Council for May 2024**

*“For far too many, peace has remained an elusive dream; a precious commodity they yearn for amid the turmoil of conflict and instability. It has remained an absolute prerequisite for social and economic wellbeing and, hence, development.”*

**Mr. Helder Da Costa, General Secretary, G7+ Secretariat**

*“There can be no peaceful, just, inclusive society without ending all forms of violence.”*

**Ms. Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children**

*“According to the Global Peace Index, the world is the least peaceful that it has been since the measurements began almost twenty years ago.”*

**Mr. Michael Collins, Executive Director, The Americas, Institute for Economics & Peace**



## Session 2: Promoting the rule of law, equal access to justice, and the fight against corruption and organized crime



The compounding effects of intersecting global crises are closely correlated to a global decline in the rule of law, as justice systems come under tremendous pressure from insecurity, attacks on the independence of the judiciary, and corruption. This further exacerbates the situation of over five billion people worldwide who lack meaningful access to justice.

Strengthening the rule of law at global, national and local levels can help rebuild trust, tackle challenges including conflict and climate change and catalyze progress across the 2030 Agenda. When the legal system operates fairly and impartially, it promotes public confidence in governance, leads to greater civic engagement and creates an enabling environment for sustainable development.

Addressing global crises, from climate change to corruption, requires people-centred approaches grounded in the rule of law, human rights, and the principles of equity, equality, and non-discrimination. Closing the justice gap, particularly for women and girls, will require transitioning to people-centred approaches that emphasize better use of data and evidence, innovating service

delivery and utilizing diverse pathways to justice with a focus on improved outcomes for the end users. People-centred justice approaches reorient justice systems around a better understanding of people's needs and their lived realities. Legal literacy and empowerment can arm the least powerful with the tools and knowledge they need to claim their rights, participate in decision-making, and gain trust. This will require increasing political and financial support for the rule of law and people-centred approaches to justice and governance in national budgets, and development assistance, particularly in fragile and crisis affected contexts.

There is a need for fair, effective, and equitable mechanisms to address complex, transnational challenges such as climate change that pose significant obstacles to peace and sustainable development. Applying a justice lens to climate action is essential as the causes and effects of climate change – and the actions needed to address them – are fundamentally linked to issues of justice, equity and accountability. Research carried out by UNEP and OHCHR shows that marginalized groups, including women and persons with diverse gender identity, are leading environment and climate actions at all levels but their voice, agency and participation are undervalued and under-resourced even though they make environmental action more effective. The rule of law can enable transformative and gender-responsive climate action if it is informed by gender-disaggregated data and rooted in understanding of gender imbalances, if it is accompanied by a strengthening of institutions and their capacities to enable and promote more just and equitable social systems.

With their profound negative impact on the rule of law, good governance and human rights, corruption and organized crime threaten peace and security, undermine trust in public institutions, hamper the provision of public services and thwart inclusive economic development. Building on existing instruments, such as the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, is critical to ensure that public resources are effectively spent and promote greater transparency, accountability, and integrity at national and international levels. Judicial institutions, in partnership with other parts of government, oversight institutions and civil society can play an important role in the fight against corruption. Ensuring the independence and integrity of justice institutions must be a priority.

## **Quotes from speakers**

*“Putting people at the centre of our efforts is key. It is imperative to reorient justice systems around a better understanding of people’s needs and respect for their human rights, including an emphasis on the rights that matter most to them.”*

**Ms. Jan Beagle, Director-General, IDLO**

*“We should never have a passive attitude towards these challenges. This is part of the purpose of maintaining the rule of law as a necessary condition to ensure that human rights are upheld in all communities and, as a result, it is a condition for democratic life and for peace.”*

**Mr. Orlando Aguirre Gómez, President of the Supreme Court of Justice, Republic of Costa Rica**

*“At USAID, we recognize that health, climate, gender, and economic issues are – at their core – governance issues and rule of law challenges that can only be effectively addressed with people-centred approaches.”*

**Ms. Shannon N. Green, Assistant to the Administrator of the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG), United States Agency for International Development**

*“Climate impacts are a threat multiplier and have a destabilizing impact on options for a country’s development [..]. The rule of law is not merely a tool for governance but a foundational element for transformative, inclusive and just climate action which can guide us towards a sustainable and equitable future where no one is left behind.”*

**Ms. Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Director, Law Division, United Nations Environment Programme**

*“It is really important that we get local communities engaged in the fight against corruption but also in the fight in ensuring that we deliver on SDG 16.”*

**Mr. Abdul Tejan-Cole, Executive Director, African Centre of Excellence – Access to Justice**

### Session 3: Developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels in support of the SDGs



Trends show that SDG 16 is not likely to be met by 2030, and that there is even regression on some targets. High levels of corruption and inadequate institutional responsiveness are eroding fragile social contracts. At the same time, a rise in populism risks bringing about policies that foster resentment and exacerbate social divides and inequality.

There is a clear need to strengthen access to public institutions and confidence and trust in them. In particular, in many countries there are low levels of trust among women and minorities, and decreased confidence in judiciaries. Public institutions improve their ways of working and can build trust when they are accountable to people, ethical, inclusive, responsive and transparent.

Institutions that are democratic and resilient are better positioned to formulate responses to increasingly complex crises and challenges. This connection illustrates how SDG 16 is foundational to other SDGs. Confronting current and evolving realities and challenges while also planning for the future necessitates coordination among institutions at all levels as well as developing and maintaining technological capacity.

SDG 16 is closely related to the health of democracies. Democratic institutions must become drivers of the transformations needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda. This requires them to guarantee the upholding of human rights and a focus on building an equitable society. To this end, it is important to strengthen civil servants' knowledge of rights. Greater representation of women and minority groups at all levels also fosters equity in addition to effectiveness and responsive.

Accountability ecosystems and public participation in meaningful spaces are crucial elements of sound institutional frameworks and processes. These entail strong environments of checks and balances, and institutional and civic accountability mechanisms. Independent oversight institutions, including national audit institutions, ombudspersons and parliaments, as well as civil society and independent media, including human rights defenders and investigative journalists, all have key roles.

Some countries are taking important steps in these areas. They are implementing reforms to policy planning systems, including through digitalization that enhanced public engagement. They are enhancing public service standards and ease of access, including through digital government. They are also improving transparency and openness through proactive disclosure of and enhanced access to information as well as open data. Processes that enhance efficiency, openness and transparency should be institutionalized in order to be sustained.

Misinformation and disinformation are a growing source of instability and conflict and must be urgently addressed, including through regulation. The current state of play gives disproportionate visibility to divisive content. Transparency is key to progressing in this area. As a first step, content platforms should be legally required to disclose their content moderation policies and the algorithms they use. There is a need for standards of publication of public information. Governments should consider frameworks for open data.

More oversight bodies such as parliamentary committees and working groups are specifically focused on monitoring progress towards SDG 16 targets. There is also more frequent use of technology to enhance transparency and accountability such as parliamentary online platforms for public participation and access to legislative documents.

A whole-of-government approach to 2030 Agenda implementation is essential for its realization. Political leadership is key at all levels. For instance, local governments can take the lead in tailoring appropriate responses to critical challenges. In many countries, they play important roles in national SDG coordination mechanisms and support reporting on SDG progress.

In parallel, a whole-of-society approach is also critical. Broad participation in SDG implementation enhances ownership in the 2030 Agenda. Collaboration among stakeholders is essential to achieving transformative change. It can be fostered by SDG coordination bodies that are inclusive of various actors. In Finland, the national commission on sustainable development has the representation of all government ministries, municipalities and regions, parliament, the Sámi Parliament, and many other stakeholders.

Civil society is a vital partner in fostering effective, accountable and transparent institutions. It supports democratic processes and thereby more effective policies for meeting people's needs through equitable and sustainable development. Civil society actors may hold public trust that politicians lack. They can often build bridges and trust between communities and institutions. Yet stakeholders are concerned about shrinking civic space. It is important to strengthen civil society capacity to shape policies and promote accountability through institutional and social means.

In particular, continued efforts are needed to enable and support civil society to understand and influence public budgets. Civil society participation in the budget process, through tracking, analysis, and advocacy, can lead to enhanced budget credibility and more responsive, equitable, and efficient government spending that improves people's well-being and advances the SDGs. Engagement by grass-roots organizations and people who have been marginalized in budgetary discussions is especially critical for helping to direct funds to where they are needed most and leaving no one behind.

The private sector can also help in advancing sustainable development and responding to crises, providing cooperation and funding. In Colombia, a private sector fund established for violence prevention and opportunities for youth following a major national strike enabled the city of Palmira to implement a comprehensive youth violence-reduction programme, PAZOS, that has led to a significant reduction in the homicide rate.

Collaboration can advance critical research for achieving SDG progress. There is a need for more data and analysis to enable better understanding of what does and does not work. At the same time, some evidence has been established and requires action rather than further study and debate.

## **Quotes from speakers**

*“All States should aspire to have responsible, inclusive, and effective institutions that are based on human rights and ethical action. They should be efficient, open and transparent to build strong democracy through processes that can be institutionalized.”*

**Ms. Claudia del Rosario Palencia Morales, Vice Minister of the Ministry of the Interior, Guatemala**

*“People are losing faith in governance systems, public institutions, because they are not meeting people’s expectations.”*

**Ms. Ulrika Modéer, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Director, Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy, United Nations Development Programme**

*“It is key to support and create strong environments of checks and balances, to create strong institutional and civic accountability mechanisms.” ... “all this cannot function if we don’t also support independent media, human rights defenders and civil society... strengthen public awareness and also counter the damaging effects of information manipulation and interference.”*

**Mr. Martin Seychell, Deputy Director General, Directorate General for International Partnerships, European Commission**

*“We politicians do not have the trust of the people in a world in which democracy is being questioned every day. Places like this, international congresses and even our city councils, are too far away from people. So, we have to bring the opportunities closer to them, and we have to do it not only from the institutional sector but working together with the private sector and civil society...this works...”*

**Mr. Oscar Escobar, former Mayor of Palmira, Colombia**

*“The sectors of sanitation, gender, and environment are the ones that suffer the most from underspending.” ... “Changes in execution are normal. Maybe they’re needed. But Governments need to make sure they explain why.”*

**Ms. Ana Patricia Muñoz, Executive Director, International Budget Partnership**

*“The world is not only not on track to meet SDG 16, but regressing on a number of its targets”  
“With the current data, the trends show that of the 12 SDG 16 targets, none are likely to be met by 2030” “The data available shows the need to stress the urgency of rebuilding and strengthening trust in institutions.”*

**Ms. Maria Isabel Aninat Sahli, Dean, Universidad Adolfo Ibanez Law School and Vice Chair, International IDEA’s Board of Advisers**

## Session 4: Building more inclusive societies for all



SDG 16 reflects a commitment to ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels, as well as safeguarding access to information and fundamental freedoms.

Embracing a multi-stakeholder approach is essential for enhancing governance, promoting inclusivity, and combating discrimination. This involves adopting policies that address the needs of vulnerable and minority groups, ensuring that different segments of society are making progress. Examples of interventions that can help achieve this goal include social justice programmes that prioritize equal education for all, social audits, community engagement, the use of technology to reach disadvantaged communities, and innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships. Marginalized groups are leading environmental climate action at all levels. More resources are needed to support their voice and participation.

More sex-disaggregated data are needed to better understand gender imbalances, and in turn to reduce inter-personal violence, improve women's access to justice, and enable transformative climate and environmental action. Updated data frameworks are required that recognize the



need to represent the full spectrum of human diversity beyond simplistic gender binaries. This has critical implications, including for artificial intelligence.

To make progress in achieving just and inclusive societies, prevention of violence against children is vital. Children and youth account for two thirds of the world population living in poverty and often find themselves absent from decision-making platforms. Participation of youth and children is key. Significant progress has been made at the United Nations in this regard. This includes the launch of the UN youth strategy, UN Security Council resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security, and the appointment of the first-ever Assistant Secretary-General on Youth Affairs. Two prevailing trends that negatively impact their participation are the shrinking space for civic engagement and the spread of disinformation and misinformation online. Meaningful participation necessitates genuine opportunities that empower children and youth to engage, allowing them to choose how they convey their messages, and ensuring there are audiences prepared to listen and act upon their input.

Supporting citizen engagement is crucial at every level, from local to international. At the national level, citizens need to have a voice beyond elections, such as through participatory budgeting or citizen assemblies. At the international level, citizens should understand the roles, mandates, functions, and significance of international institutions. It is important to identify and foster creativity within traditional spaces, bringing people, including youth, together and meeting them where they are using various mediums such as arts and music.

Digitalization is a critical driver of transformation that can either improve or exacerbate inequalities. It is imperative to ensure that it serves as a positive force. Emerging technologies have the capacity to increase efficiency, transparency, and participation in democratic processes. However, risks posed by misinformation, censorship, surveillance, and internet shutdowns should be considered.

As Governments leverage digitalization and new technologies, close attention should be paid to bridging the digital divide and ensuring that no one is left behind. Governments should invest in digital transformation to ensure digital connectivity and inclusivity for all citizens, regardless of their circumstances. The Government of Singapore ensures “Digital access at home” by supporting low-income households and providing subsidized broadband and digital devices. The Government of Germany is promoting a human rights-based and multi-stakeholder approach to fostering an inclusive digital transformation.

It is essential to recognize that algorithms shaping human interaction do not operate in a vacuum; they embody the biases and perspectives of their creators, often failing to represent the diversity of the global majority. This can lead to a digital ecosystem that excludes or misrepresents marginal populations. In shaping digital norms, it is imperative that the trajectory of digital governance is guided by citizens to help ensure that new technologies do not perpetuate existing inequalities. Achieving this requires the establishment of robust mechanisms, regular independent audits, and

strong regulatory enforcement. Moreover, existing platforms need to be leveraged to translate international commitments into implementation.

### **Quotes from speakers**

*“SDG 16 lies at the heart of Agenda 2030 because of its commitment to transparency, accountability, and participation. And it has been described by many as a key to unlock the Sustainable Development Goals.”*

**Mr. Mandeep Tiwana, Chief Officer, Evidence and Engagement, CIVICUS**

*“Our conviction in nation building is that every stakeholder has a role in building strong and inclusive institutions.”*

**Mr. Luke Goh, Permanent Secretary for Law and Second Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Singapore**

*“Building just and peaceful societies requires all sectors of society and must include the opportunity for children and youth to bring issues of concern to them; and we must be prepared to listen.”*

**Ms. June Kunugi, Director, Public Partnerships Division, United Nations Children’s Fund**

*“At the national level there are a variety of ways that we need to continue to encourage to ensure that citizens have a voice in decision making, not just at elections but through participatory budgeting for example as pioneered in Brazil and citizen assemblies such as the climate assembly as held in France a few years ago”*

**Mr. Blair Glencorse, Co-CEO, Accountability Lab and Civil Society Co-Chair, Steering Committee, Open Government Partnership**

*“We need to tackle the data paradox, where the most surveilled groups are also the most neglected in data narratives. This disparity leads to policies that fail to address or even worsen their challenges.”*

**Ms. Luísa Franco Machado, Young Leader for the SDGs**

## Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+



Since the inception of the Conference in 2019, civil society has been an indispensable partner, offering invaluable contributions that have enriched the discussions. During this session, representatives from civil society presented the 2024 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+. The declaration takes stock of the current context and state of play for SDG16+ issues and presents a series of recommendations to scale-up action on SDG16+.

Acknowledging the Declaration, the Director-General of IDLO stressed that “at a time of narrowing civic space, it is crucial that we continue to protect and foster an enabling environment for civil society to thrive.” In doing so, “we uphold the principles of participation, transparency, and inclusivity that are at the core of SDG 16 and essential for achieving the entire 2030 Agenda,” she emphasized.

*The following is a summary provided by the convenors of the Rome Declaration.*

### **Challenges**

The 2024 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+ highlights critical issues threatening global peace and sustainable development. Notably, the alarming rise in global conflict, with civilian death tolls reaching levels not seen since 1945. This increase in geopolitical conflicts undermines

progress made thus far in achieving SDG 16 and the wider 2030 Agenda, underscoring the urgent need for enhanced governmental accountability. In the Declaration, civil society expresses its concern about the uneven focus of the international community on conflicts as they manifest themselves, calling for attention and resources to be allocated based upon needs, and not on geopolitical proximity.

Civil society is under immense strain as the space for their work continues to shrink. Civil society acts as a vital bridge between right-holders and duty-bearers, helping to measure SDG progress and holding governments accountable. However, restrictive laws, harassment, and limited funding are significantly hampering their capacity to thrive. Further, conflict and instability hinder economic development, exacerbate poverty, and undermine social well-being globally. Therefore, comprehensive conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts, integrated across all SDGs, are essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Furthermore, there has been a noticeable shift in the political landscape—regression in democracy accompanied by rising authoritarianism and increasing violence, has profound implications for civil society worldwide. The declaration acknowledges disproportionate military expenditure at the expense of humanitarian aid and development assistance, exacerbating insecurity and undermining peacebuilding efforts. Adding to the complexity of the situation, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, along with advancements in military technology pose a significant threat to peace and security.

### **Call to action**

The declaration serves as a rallying cry. It calls for key measures that include the recognition of the SDG 16 as an enabler for the other SDGs, financial reforms and reallocation, strengthening data and monitoring, as well as promoting accountability. It underscores the need for recognizing the indispensable role of civil society for SDG16+ and the 2030 Agenda, as well as stating the need for expanding civic space. Furthermore, it concludes with a call to mobilize our commitments to SDG16+ at the 2024 Summit of the Future, 2025 International Conference on Financing for Development and the 2025 World Social Summit.

These upcoming events present a pivotal opportunity to create traction surrounding SDG16, and for governments to advance policies and decisions that could have a significant multiplier effect in advancing SDG16+, and building more peaceful, just, inclusive societies and responsive institutions.

The 2024 Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+ urges Member States and other stakeholders to move beyond rhetoric and good intentions and boldly embrace and implement concrete and genuine commitments.

# SDG 16 High-Level Conference 2024

## Peace, justice and inclusive societies for sustainable development

Monday, 6 May 2024

Trusteeship Council Chamber, United Nations Headquarters, New York

### AGENDA

| 6 May 2024    |  |
|---------------|--|
| 10:00 - 10:30 | <b>Registration</b>  |
| 10:30 - 11:10 | <p><b>High-Level Opening</b></p> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H. E. Mr. Sergio Mattarella, President of the Republic of Italy</li> <li>• H. E. Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations</li> <li>• Mr. Li Junhua, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)</li> <li>• Ms. Jan Beagle, Director-General, International Development Law Organization (IDLO)</li> </ul> <p><b>Moderator:</b> H. E. Amb. Maurizio Massari, Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations</p>  |
| 11:15 - 12:30 | <p><b>First panel session: Promoting peaceful societies for sustainable development</b></p> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H. E. Amb. Sarah Safyn Fyneah, Permanent Representative of Liberia to the United Nations</li> <li>• H. E. Amb. Pedro Comissário Afonso, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Mozambique to the United Nations and President of the Security Council for May 2024</li> <li>• Mr. Helder Da Costa, General Secretary, g7+ Secretariat</li> <li>• Ms. Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children</li> </ul> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Mr. Michael Collins, Executive Director, Institute for Economics and Peace</p> |

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 12:30 - 13:00 | <p><b>Presentation of the updated Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+</b></p> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. Gwendolyn Myers, Executive Director, Messengers of Peace Liberia and Co-Chair, Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS)</li> <li>• Ms. Charlotte Le Faucheur, Program Associate, Cordaid</li> <li>• Mr. Peter van Sluijs, Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention Expert and Coordinator, CSPPS</li> <li>• Ms. Elizabeth Hume, Executive Director, Alliance for Peacebuilding and Co-chair, Transparency, Accountability &amp; Participation (TAP) Network/CSPPS</li> <li>• Ms. Jan Beagle, Director-General, International Development Law Organization (IDLO)</li> </ul> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Mr. John Romano, Director, TAP Network</p> |
| 13:00 – 15:00 | <p><b>Lunch break</b></p>  |
| 15:00 - 15:50 | <p><b>Second panel session: Promoting the rule of law, equal access to justice, and the fight against corruption and organized crime</b></p> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Orlando Aguirre Gómez, President of the Supreme Court of Justice, Republic of Costa Rica</li> <li>• Ms. Shannon N. Green, Assistant to the Administrator of the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG), United States Agency for International Development (USAID)</li> <li>• Ms. Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Director, Law Division, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)</li> <li>• Mr. Abdul Tejan-Cole, Executive Director, African Centre of Excellence – Access to Justice (ACE-AJ)</li> </ul> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Ms. Jan Beagle, Director-General, IDLO</p>                 |

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 15:50 - 16:40 | <p><b>Third panel session: Developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels in support of the SDGs</b></p> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. Claudia del Rosario Palencia Morales, Vice Minister of the Ministry of the Interior, Guatemala</li> <li>• Mr. Martin Seychell, Deputy Director General, Directorate General for International Partnerships, European Commission</li> <li>• Mr. Oscar Escobar, former Mayor of Palmira, Colombia</li> <li>• Ms. Ana Patricia Muñoz, Executive Director, International Budget Partnership</li> <li>• Ms. Maria Isabel Aninat Sahli, Dean, Universidad Adolfo Ibanez Law School and Vice Chair, International IDEA's Board of Advisers</li> </ul> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Ms. Ulrika Modéer, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Director, Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)</p> |
| 16:40 - 17:30 | <p><b>Fourth panel session: Building more inclusive societies for all</b></p> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Luke Goh, Permanent Secretary for Law and Second Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Singapore</li> <li>• Ms. June Kunugi, Director, Public Partnerships Division, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)</li> <li>• Mr. Blair Glencorse, Co-CEO, Accountability Lab and Civil Society Co-Chair, Steering Committee, Open Government Partnership</li> <li>• Ms. Luísa Franco Machado, Young Leader for the SDGs</li> </ul> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Mr. Mandeep Tiwana, Chief Officer, Evidence and Engagement, CIVICUS</p>   |

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 17:30 - 18:00 | <p><b>Closing of the conference: SDG 16 and the road to the High-level Political Forum and the Summit of the Future</b></p> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• H. E. Ms. Paula Narváez, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations and President, United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)</li><li>• Mr. Li Junhua, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, UN DESA</li><li>• Ms. Jan Beagle, Director-General, IDLO</li></ul> <p><b>Moderator:</b> H. E. Amb. Gianluca Greco, Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations</p> |
|---------------|---|





ORGANIZED BY



PARTNERS

