**General Assembly
Economic and Social Council**

General Assembly **Seventy-eighth session** Agenda item 13 **Integrated and coordinated implementation of and** **follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations** **conferences and summits in the economic, social and** **related fields**	**Economic and Social Council** **2024 session** 27 July 2023–24 July 2024 Agenda item 10 **The role of the United Nations system in the** **integration of the three dimensions of** **sustainable development into the** **implementation of and follow-up to the 2030** **Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Letter dated 11 June 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to present the key messages of the Sustainable Development Goal 16 High-level Conference on the theme "Peace, justice and inclusive societies for sustainable development", held at United Nations Headquarters on 6 May 2024 (see annex).

The High-level Conference, on its fifth edition, was co-organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the International Development Law Organization and the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations, and it was inaugurated with remarks by the President of the Republic of Italy, Sergio Mattarella. It served as a preparatory conference for the in-depth review of Sustainable Development Goal 16 at the upcoming high-level political forum on sustainable development, also with the aim of informing relevant processes, including the ministerial declaration of the high-level political forum and the Summit of the Future and its Pact.

The Conference reaffirmed the strong link between peace, justice, the rule of law, inclusive societies, governance and sustainable development and the role of Sustainable Development Goal 16 as a critical enabler for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals.

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 13, and of the Economic and Social Council, under agenda item 10.

(*Signed*) Maurizio **Massari**
Ambassador

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Annex to the letter dated 11 June 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

16 Key Messages from the SDG 16 High-Level Conference "Peace, justice and inclusive societies for sustainable development" 6 May 2024

The SDG 16 High-Level Conference, co-organized by Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations, served as a preparatory conference for the in-depth review of SDG 16 at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and is meant to inform other relevant processes, including the UN Summit of the Future. The following key messages arose from the debates involving representatives from governments, judiciary institutions, international organizations, civil society, academia, local leaders, and practitioners.

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 is 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.

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