

UNITED NATIONS



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**MS. AMINA MOHAMED
DEPUTY-SECRETARY-GENERAL**

Opening remarks at the SDG 16 Conference 2024 [as delivered]

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Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

I would like to begin by thanking the Government of Italy for its deep commitment to this important topic and its support of this conference, as evidenced by H.E. President Mattarella joining us this morning.

I am grateful to the Permanent Mission of Italy and Ambassador Massari for once again co-organizing this encounter with the United Nations.

Excellencies,

In these times of immense challenge, this conference could not be more relevant.

Sustainable Development Goal 16 is not only critical to the success of the 2030 Agenda, it is also critical to achieving the right to development upon which the economic, social, cultural and political advancement of all peoples depends.

To societies of peace.

To societies supported by strong, accountable and trustworthy institutions.

To just and inclusive societies, in which every person has a voice.

But looking around the world today, we see these ideals growing more distant by the day.

Conflict and violence are rampant with women and children bearing the brunt.

Access to justice remains elusive for hundreds of millions of people.

Corruption in all its forms is still a major obstacle to sustainable development, corroding trust between people and public institutions.

Civic spaces continues to shrink, as social contracts erode, and societies become more divided along ethnic and religious lines.

Democracy is being undermined and freedom of the press is under assault.

Science and evidence are being called into question.

And all the bulwarks that support civilization – from human rights to international law to human dignity – are being chipped away.

Meanwhile, many national and international institutions lack the investments required to enable the capacities needed to foster the transformations to achieve the SDGs.

At every step, our efforts to support and protect the rule of law are suffering and being undermined.

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 and security, human rights and development.

Without this common thread, SDG 16's vision of a sustainable, secure, inclusive and peaceful future is impossible.

Dear friends,

Accelerating progress towards SDG 16 and delivering on the right to development depends on four interlocking actions.

First, it requires a recommitment to the fundamental principles of the UN Charter.

We cannot achieve sustainable development or protect human rights if the foundations of international law are undermined at every turn.

The war in Gaza, the Russian invasion in Ukraine, the situation in Sudan and beyond are destroying the prospects of millions of people to realize their rights and potential.

It is time to silence the guns, to settle our disputes through peaceful means, to recommit to human rights as they apply to peace and security and to give peace and development a chance.

Second, SDG 16 requires greater commitment from all in power to strengthen democracy and respect the rule of law.

In recent years, we've seen a surge in military coups, several cases of large-scale corruption, hugely divisive rhetoric from political leaders, and interference in democratic processes aimed at further polarizing societies.

It is now time that we invest in and renew our democratic processes, that we strengthen public participation, empower civil society and foster greater social cohesion.

Third, it demands a fundamental retooling of public institutions.

The scale of the investments required to advance digital, energy and food transitions that will drive SDG achievement is enormous.

And the current capacities, skills and tools of public institutions simply will not cut it today.

It is essential that governments and their partners embark on a process of public institutions renewal, breaking down outdated stereotypes, and ensuring our public institutions are equipped to broker partnerships, build project pipelines, leverage digital tools and data insights, and embrace participatory approaches.

Fourth, SDG 16 requires a multilateral system that works for the people.

The inequities stemming from the current architecture are a source of frustration for many people around the world.

Correcting this injustice is a critical step towards rebuilding trust and global solidarity.

We need to provide far greater voice and representation to developing countries in international financial institutions.

We need those institutions to be far more willing to respond to the massive financing and means of implementation needs of developing countries.

And we need an international tax system that is built by all states, not just the wealthiest countries.

This September's Summit of the Future – and next year's Financing for Development Conference – will be important opportunities to advance the agenda of financial justice.

Excellencies,

The UN system is fully committed to supporting governments to deliver on SDG 16 and to leverage SDG 16 for the advancement of the entire 2030 Agenda.

Our Resident Coordinators and Country Teams are working to strengthen the capacity of national institutions to drive major SDG transitions, including by leveraging key initiatives on the Power of Data, on FutureGov and on Digital Public Infrastructure.

Last year's adoption of the New Vision for the Rule of Law is a clear demonstration of the UN system's commitment to working with Member States to build capacity and provide technical assistance in this critical area.

And the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights reminds us that the UN's human rights framework is an essential component and enabler of SDG 16, including supporting national human rights, justice and other institutions and legal instruments.

This is an important reminder that SDG 16 will not be achieved by governments alone.

We need all hands on deck to make it a reality. We need solidarity.

This year offers a number of key opportunities to right our course – from the HLPF in July to the Summit of the Future in September.

Actions to promote effective, transparent, and accountable institutions should be front and center, as should be their leadership.

I know that we can count on all of us to move this agenda forward that would make a difference in the lives of our women, our youth and future generations.

Excellencies,

Today, we received grave reports of an impending assault by the IDF on Rafah. My plea to the government of Israel is to rescind the decision which consequences will be a human catastrophe.

The human suffering of hostages, the human suffering of Palestinians, and women and children is enough. Let's give peace a chance and let's use this forum to advocate and to raise our voices for peace – for the people of Israel and the people of Palestine.

I thank you.