12th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

8-10 October 2015 in Merida, Mexico

The Sustainable Development Goals: What Role for National Human Rights Institutions?

Video Statement

Distinguished Chairpersons,
Representatives of National Human Rights Institutions,
Excellencies, colleagues and friends,

It is a great pleasure to address the 12th international conference of National Human Rights Institutions. I thank the National Human Rights Commission of Mexico for organizing what promises to be a fascinating conference, and I regret that I am unable to join you in this lovely Yucatán capital.

This is an exciting moment for those of us who are committed to enabling the realisation of human rights through sustainable development. Today's event will be among the first discussions of implementation to follow the launch of the Agenda for Sustainable Development two weeks ago. That Agenda has the ambition to transform the world. It offers a new vision of sustainable development that is deeply grounded in civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as well as the right to development; one which is powered by the need to end discrimination on any grounds.

The time has come to begin implementation, and NHRIs have a vital role to play. The Agenda is underpinned by inclusive frameworks for accountability and for monitoring; within those frameworks, we are counting on you to get involved to help to keep all actors on track. With your unique positioning as a bridge linking governments, Parliaments, various State entities, and civil society organizations, you can help to ensure that they continue to keep a central focus on human rights concerns as they build the new Agenda into their programmes.

The new Agenda provides for regular national reviews of progress towards its 17 Goals and 169 targets. During the consultative process, we fought hard for you to have a say in those national reviews; now it is time for you to make your voices heard. At these critical intersections, to which many stakeholders will be contributing input, you NHRIs can play an important role in making sure that national processes continue to be grounded in the principles of human rights, and in the detailed recommendations of the international human rights mechanisms. By ensuring that a human rights-based approach is effectively applied in national level reviews, you can contribute to strengthening the accountability of State actors and others. This is the level at which the SDGs will have most meaning in people's lives, and your inputs will be a key factor in maintaining a strong framework for accountability between governments and the people they serve.
At the global level, the High Level Political Forum, under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council, will feature country reviews. While the details of the reviews still need to be worked out, each country is expected to make two to four presentations, on a voluntary basis, on their progress in achieving the SDGs between now and 2030. The contributions of NHRIs can also be vital at this level.

The global country reviews will be another opportunity for NHRIs to ensure that human rights concerns are integrated into national programmes, as part of their now widely recognized role in promoting the implementation of human rights norms at national level. But NHRIs are also uniquely positioned to provide the United Nations with evidence-based information and insight on human rights situations on the ground, including your submissions to the treaty bodies and the Human Rights Council’s Special Procedures and Universal Periodic Review. The value of these contributions by NHRIs has been acknowledged by both the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

With a new Agenda that has human rights at its heart, there are clear echoes between this review process and the UPR. In your submissions to the UPR and treaty bodies you provide information that is of immediate relevance for a global-level assessment of progress towards the SDGs. We will count on you to support us in advocating that States draw upon this critical information in their country presentations to the High Level Political Forum.

One final point, on indicators. We are deeply encouraged by the Agenda’s commitment to equality, and its commitment to “leave no one behind”. But as we all know, we cannot fix what we cannot see. To undo the barriers thrown up by discrimination, we must be able to monitor progress for all, including the most marginalized and vulnerable. To ensure that the global SDG indicator framework is truly human rights-based, data must be accurate and disaggregated in terms of all grounds of discrimination that are prohibited under international human rights law. We will count on you to engage with national statistical offices to ensure that the indicator framework which is currently being designed is human rights sensitive.

On all these points and more, my Office stands ready to support you. NHRIs will be critical partners in the hard work of implementing this transformative new Agenda. With your active involvement, and that of the many other human rights constituencies that have seized the opportunities associated with this agenda, I have no doubt that we will succeed.

I wish you a fruitful discussion.

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