

Amplified Commitments and Partnerships for Accelerated Action:

Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+

May 2019

Preamble

Recalling *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, we reaffirm that it is indeed "We the Peoples" who are embarking on the road to 2030.¹ As a leader in setting vision and building momentum to create and implement this ambitious agenda, civil society reminds Member States and the international community that it is only this collective approach that will ensure its success. Meaningful participation is key to the 2030 Agenda and particularly relevant for Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG16) and its goals and targets related to peace, justice, and inclusion.

The 2030 Agenda is for people, prosperity, and planet – and its accompanying 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – represent indivisible and interrelated components of the entire sustainable development framework. SDG16, however, is both a stand-alone goal as well as a foundational underpinning to all of the other SDGs. As a result, SDG16 is now commonly referred to as "SDG16+" – reflecting the interdependence of peace and development as well as linkages to other goals and targets, such as gender equality in SDG5 and reducing inequalities in SDG10 that embody broader commitments to peace, justice, and inclusion.² Delivery on the targets of SDG16 impacts the world's overall ability to achieve sustainable development.

Taking stock of global progress towards achieving SDG16+ is an important part of determining future focus. With SDG16 being reviewed for the first time at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) and the SDGs being reviewed for the first time at the SDGs Summit during the opening of the 74th United Nations General Assembly, 2019 marks an unprecedented opportunity to scale up our collective efforts towards SDG16+ implementation. To contribute to this, civil society organizations (CSOs) from around the world met in Rome, Italy on 26 May 2019 in the context of the SDG16 Conference (Rome Conference) after a series of in-depth consultations, convened by UNDESA, IDLO, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Italy in preparation for the 2019 HLPF. The resulting Civil Society outcome document – *Amplified Commitment and Partnerships for Accelerated Action: The Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+ (Rome Declaration)* – highlights key civil society priority areas, recommendations, and an urgent call-to-action to achieve the real transformative potential of SDG16+.

As civil society, we call on all actors, including Member States, UN bodies, multilateral agencies, donors, the private sector, CSOs, think tanks, research institutions, and others to collectively accelerate and increase efforts across all relevant SDG goals and targets to address structural inequalities, gendered, racial, and other forms of discrimination, and violence. These forms of exclusion and marginalization are structural obstacles to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda that must be addressed for its realization.

¹ UN Resolution 70/1. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2015.

² See among others the Pathfinders' Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, the creation of the 16+ Forum as well as the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies.

Introduction

1. As recognised by Political Declarations of the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) and other UN and civil society analyses,³ numerous challenges and structural barriers confront the realisation of the ambitious SDG16+.
2. Collectively, the world is off track in realising the 2030 Agenda and thus realising inclusive and peaceful societies. Around the world, over 40 countries are in active conflict, and 92 countries have become less peaceful over the last 10 years.⁴ Violence causes 1.6 million deaths worldwide every year.⁵ 5.1 billion people have unmet justice needs globally.⁶
3. The past year saw ever increasing attacks on human rights and justice defenders; in the area of environmental justice alone, 321 defenders were killed in 2017.⁷ Civil society faces barriers to participation, relating to inadequate funding, visa restrictions, and the scope, substance, and follow-up to participation.
4. Structural inequalities, rising authoritarianism, exclusion and tokenization, inadequate capacity, and lack of political will to address peace, justice, and governance issues limit advancement of the agenda. World military expenditure has increased to \$1739 billion by 2017.⁸ Less than 2% of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) is spent on justice systems, and funding for justice has decreased by 40% in the last 5 years.⁹
5. Meanwhile, there is an increasing move to accredit military-security spending as a 'progressive' contribution to SDG16+, despite the risks of undermining peace and development efforts.¹⁰
6. Addressing the underlying causes of conflict, insecurity, and systemic injustice is better done through long-term, upstream investments and early action to address marginalization and inequalities, promoting inclusion, and supporting economic and human development.

Our shared principles and commitments

7. The vision for and implementation of the SDGs are guided by a number of key principles and commitments.
8. **Leaving no one behind** is at the core of the 2030 Agenda and must be the departing point of our strategies, policies, funding, and implementation. Our collective energy must reach those who are marginalised due to gender, race, ethnicity, age, ability, class, sexual orientation, and gender identity first. We must place greater emphasis on meeting the needs and ensuring the rights of those most at risk of being left behind with inclusive approaches that are age and gender-responsive, with a special focus on persons living with HIV/AIDs,

³ For example: 2017 HLPF Political Declaration, Pathfinders Justice Task Force report (2019), Hague Declaration on Equal Access to Justice for All by 2030 (2019); findings of the High-level Group on Justice for Women (2019); Declaration of Ulaanbaatar Democracy Forum (2019) and Tokyo Democracy Forum (2019); Outcome documents of the PyeongChang Global Peace Forum (2019); Pathways for Peace Report (2018); Declaration of the Busan Democracy Forum (2018), Sustaining Peace Resolution (2016); Addressing Fragility and Building Peace in a Changing World (Stockholm Declaration) (2016).

⁴ IIEP. 2018.

⁵ World Health Organization. 2012.

⁶ Pathfinders. Justice For All: Report of the Task Force on Justice. May 2019.

⁷ Justice For All. *Justice For All: The Case to Fund and Protect Grassroots Justice Defenders*. January 2019.

⁸ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. July 2018.

⁹ Justice For All. *Justice For All: The Case to Fund and Protect Grassroots Justice Defenders*. January 2019.

¹⁰ See CSO Submission on TOSSD security assistance, March 2019.

persons living with disabilities, indigenous persons, refugees, internally displaced, migrants, children and youth, and women.

9. **A human rights-based approach to the SDGs is an obligation**, not an option. Protecting human rights and freedoms for all people must be the departing point for all SDG related work. Ensuring inclusive and participatory governance, overcoming discriminatory legislation, and promoting social protection that support economic, social, and cultural rights is key. Civil society must be able to adequately represent and consult local communities and grassroots groups to ensure downwards accountability.
10. **We take a people-centered approach to meeting the SDGs.** The views, needs, and experience of people most affected by the issues at hand are fundamental in determining our analysis, strategies, advocacy, and implementation. This requires the meaningful participation of at-risk groups in decision-making, peace, and governance processes in line with *Rio Principle 10*¹¹. Women and youth play a key role as peacebuilders at all levels, for example. For civil society to play its role shrinking space, increased attacks, and inadequate and fluctuating funding opportunities for civil society and human rights defenders must be curtailed.
11. **We seek to protect the planet** and ensure ecosystem integrity, including through acceleration of the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)¹² and the promotion of gender-responsive climate action with inclusive and meaningful participation, addressing climate injustice, and promoting land security as a means of conflict prevention.
12. **An integrated and universal approach** must be the basis of implementation for all SDGs, particularly SDG16+. It is the global, indivisible, and fully-integrated nature of the SDGs that makes these targets potentially transformative for all. The universality of the agenda obliges us to build peace based on inclusive participation, economic, environmental, and social justice, and inclusive institutions, which are accountable both domestically and extraterritorially based on human rights principles. It also requires ensuring meaningful, inclusive coordination within governments, across different ministries and political parties, and with partners in developing national or sectoral strategies, collecting data, and reporting on progress. Inclusive results leading to social, political, and economic outcomes should be the focus of these efforts.

Recommendations

Pursue integrated approaches and interlinkages for inclusive results

13. We call on all actors to adopt a people-centered and human-rights based approach throughout the development and implementation of SDG16+ — and all its related policies and practices.

¹¹ UN Resolution A/CONF.151/26. Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. 1992.

¹² UN Resolution A/RES/48/189. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. 1994.

14. Actors should use the legitimacy of the 2030 Agenda to convene different communities to collaborate on integrated and coordinated implementation, and ensure effective linkages between the three mutually reinforcing components of SDG16.
15. Specifically, we call on all actors to:
- a. Ensure that all national development plans and international development support integrate and prioritise all relevant SDG16+ targets.
 - b. Support local and subnational capacities of different stakeholders and communities for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, including but not limited to: alternative dispute resolution mechanisms (such as inclusive mediation process that include views of local populations affected by conflict on issues such as land rights); the implementation of inclusive peace agreements; and efforts to promote a culture of non-violence and peace through education.
 - c. Ensure universal, timely, and affordable people-centered approaches to access to justice so that “everyone is really equal before the law”; and work collaboratively and effectively through formal and informal justice systems to ensure equal access to justice for all by promoting legal empowerment.
 - d. Step up support to effective, transparent, and accountable institutions, with particular attention to increased political empowerment of vulnerable groups in decision-making positions at all levels of governance.
 - e. Improve and adopt domestic laws and develop and implement holistic, people-centered strategies connecting SDG16+ to national action plans to implement *UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security*¹³ and *UNSC Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security*.¹⁴
 - f. Undertake multi-stakeholder and gender and youth sensitive conflict analyses leading to better alignment and joint actions to prioritize and address corruption.
 - g. Support participatory budget-making and representative, accountable institutions locally, including banning arms exports to parties to a conflict.
 - h. Take into account local views and capacities, protect civil society’s legitimacy, include new stakeholders such as religious and customary leaders and faith-based groups, and comprise a meaningful participation and decision-making of women, children, young people, minorities, and other vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Mobilize and scale up commitments and investments

16. Support for and commitments to SDG16+ are severely lacking, with a gross underfunding and under-resourcing of its related work. Investing in inclusive, legitimate, representative, and accountable institutions and processes that foster social, political and economic cohesion, and safeguard people-centered peace, justice, and strong institutions is vital towards accelerating progress on SDG16+ implementation.
17. It’s time to use the HLPF and SDG Summit to "mobilize further actions to accelerate implementation."¹⁵
18. To adequately scale up both commitments and investments to this agenda, actors should:

¹³ UN Security Council S/RES/1325. *Security Council resolution 1325 [on women and peace and security]*. 2000.

¹⁴ UN Security Council S/RES/2250. *Security Council resolution 2250 [on youth, peace and security]*. 2016.

¹⁵ UN Resolution 70/1. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2015.

- a. Come to the 2019 HLPF and SDG Summit with new meaningful, concrete, and ambitious commitments on how to accelerate progress on SDG16+ implementation in their contexts.
- b. Scale up investments to civil society and grassroots approaches that respect their independence towards implementing the SDG16+ agenda by increasing global aid flows and the percentage of ODA, national budgets, and sector-specific funding, with a particular emphasis on the most fragile contexts, addressing human security needs, promoting access to justice and legal empowerment efforts, and putting the furthest behind first.
- c. End the increase of military spending on security at the expense of peace, human rights, and justice. Conflict prevention and peace funding should be given prioritization over spending on defense and militarization.
- d. Revise budgeting processes to provide overall support to SDG16+ priority areas, and ensure that these processes are inclusive and participatory.
- e. Create an “SDG16+ Challenge Fund” to help support civil society organizations working at the grassroots level to advance the ambitions of the agenda.
- f. Prioritize the curbing of illicit financial flows, including offshore tax evasion and tax avoidance, and the promotion of tax justice in line with the commitments to Financing For Development made in the Addis Ababa Agreement.¹⁶
- g. Catalyze private sector investments and innovations to advance SDG16+ priorities in line with relevant international standards and agreements according to human rights principles.

Increase capacity building for implementation

19. Capacity building needs and gaps among civil society represent one of the primary barriers to accelerating action around implementing and monitoring the SDG16, especially at grassroots and local levels.

20. Specifically we call on all actors to:

- a. Improve capacity building for civil society to address gaps around data collection, monitoring and spotlight reporting on SDG16, awareness raising, and inclusion in national VNR, public policy, and budgeting processes.¹⁷
- b. Engage local and grassroots civil society that otherwise are difficult to reach and mobilize, buttressing existing civil society resources and tools to enable these local actors to support SDG16+ implementation local levels.¹⁸
- c. Ensure core, ongoing, and sustained financial support for CSOs to support capacity building for implementation.
- d. Recognize the critical role civil society can play in capacitating and strengthening the ability of Member States and other actors to implement SDG16+ commitments.

Strengthen data, monitoring, and accountability

¹⁶ UNDESA. Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda). 2015.

¹⁷ TAP Network. “Civil Society Capacity Development for SDG16: Gaps, Challenges and Recommendations” Forthcoming, 2019.

¹⁸ Such as the Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, Advocacy: Justice and the SDGs and the SDG Accountability Handbook

21. Civil society is an essential actor in supporting and complementing the work of Member States in collecting, monitoring, and reporting on data for SDG16. CSO engagement with relevant actors, institutions, processes and mechanisms mainly at a national or local level seeks to balance formal with informal approaches to improve accountability for the SDGs.
22. Non-official data collected by civil society can fill methodological and conceptual gaps in SDG16 data through innovative approaches and partnerships, and also reduce the capacity strain on National Statistical Offices through strategic partnerships with official data collectors.
23. To refocus efforts to achieve the goals and targets of SDG16, immediate steps must be taken to support adequate data, monitoring, and accountability. To do this, actors should:
 - a. Review SDG16 annually at the HLPF, similar to SDG17, given its cross-cutting nature underpinning the whole 2030 agenda.
 - b. Provide a platform for the collection of SDG “Spotlight Reports” from civil society, and include these reports as official inputs into VNR processes at the HLPF.
 - c. Include non-official data sources alongside official data sources in the formal global and national monitoring of SDG16 implementation, including in efforts to track progress in regards to leaving no one behind.
 - d. Support the IAEG-SDG’s proposed additional official indicators on 16.3 on civil justice, 16.6 on trust in public institutions and 16.10 on fundamental freedoms.
 - e. Ensure that transparent, accountable, and independent institutional mechanisms are set up to monitor the effective implementation of ratified regional and international instruments.
 - f. Develop practical analytical and operational guidance on how SDG16+ can best foster impact for other SDGs.
 - g. Encourage the private sector to address systemic accountability issues businesses create around corruption, stolen asset recovery, tax evasion, extractive industries, transparency, and ethical investment.

Promote meaningful and inclusive participation and partnerships

24. We call on all actors to take a “whole-of-society” approach to addressing peace, justice, inclusion, and development challenges.
25. To do this, implementation strategies must involve all relevant government ministries, civil society, implementing partners, and other stakeholders, including young people, women, minorities, and other vulnerable and marginalized groups.
26. Institutions must make a shift from focusing on inclusion to prioritizing meaningful participation that enables all people and citizens to hold their governments to account through accessible, open and transparent mechanisms.
27. To promote and foster meaningful participation and partnerships, actors should:
 - a. Create mechanisms to allow inclusive and participatory policy-making on all SDG16+ related national, regional, and global policies.¹⁹ This includes integrating

¹⁹ E.g. The Ulaanbaatar Democracy Forum on SDG16+ global mechanism with a focus on the Asia region that took place in February 2019.

civil society and other stakeholders within the range of sustainable development activities - from planning and budgeting conversations to processes seeking social cohesion, lasting peace, and justice.

- b. Encourage and promote meaningful participation of civil society in national reporting processes and include its inputs into official government analyses.
- c. Create meaningful opportunities for civil society working at the local and grassroots levels, especially from the Global South, to engage and have a voice in key policy fora on implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Protect civil society and expand civic space

28. Civil society participation and citizen engagement is vital towards delivering the sustainable development agenda, especially at the local and grassroots level.
29. It is therefore vital that we ensure the adequate protection for these actors and create an enabling operating environment for them to drive implementation.
30. We call on actors, and especially Member States, to take immediate steps to do the following to enhance protections for civil society and combat the shrinking of civic space:
 - a. Expand civil society space and create an enabling environment in which civil society can freely and safely operate and assemble, in line with the 2016 *UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Civil Society Space*²⁰, especially in conflict-affected and fragile contexts.
 - b. Protect all human rights and freedoms, including full access to information for all in line with international standards.
 - c. Secure protections for human rights and justice defenders by monitoring and reporting attacks with input from civil society, formally recognizing these actors, and ending impunity against attacks.
 - d. Respect the independence of civil society actors, human rights defenders, and justice defenders to drive accountability for the sustainable development agenda, including on critical issues and ensure the safeguarding of these groups.
 - e. End persecution and harassment of civil society for engaging on SDG16+ issues and accountability mechanisms, such as the Voluntary National Reviews.

Call for Action

31. It has been nearly ten years since the international community began to first imagine and then devise what is now the 2030 Agenda and SDGs - a framework for sustainable development that we hoped would speak to the lived experiences of exclusion, inequality, conflict, environmental degradation, violence, and poverty faced by many around the world.
32. The 2030 Agenda was envisioned to bring benefits to all people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, including women, children, and young people, by ensuring basic freedoms, such as the right to participate in decision making; curbing abuses such as corruption and the illicit financial flows, including offshore tax evasion and tax avoidance, from those who need it most; ensuring access to justice and legal identities; and committing to end all forms of violence and inequality.

²⁰ UN Resolution A/HRC/RES/32/31. UN Human Rights Council, Civil society space. 2016.

33. Today, however, we are behind schedule on achieving the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda, - on leaving no-one behind and implementing the commitments to build a more peaceful, just, and inclusive society. In fact, we face the pressing reality that, in many countries and communities, progress around SDG16 and the 2030 Agenda is backsliding.
34. The time for committed, urgent, and meaningful action is now.
35. We, as civil society, call upon all actors - and especially Member States and international agencies - to fulfil their commitments and accelerate action to build peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. Between now and the next time SDG16 is reviewed, we expect to see progress in the following areas:
36. **Pursue integrated approaches and interlinkages for inclusive results.** Implement SDG16+ in an integrated manner by ensuring that all international development and national development plans prioritize SDG16 targets and meaningfully engage all stakeholders in implementation processes.
37. **Mobilize and scale up commitments and investments.** It's time to come to the 2019 High-level political forum and SDG Summit with new, meaningful, concrete, and ambitious commitments on how to accelerate progress on SDG16+. Member States must scale up investments by enabling local resource mobilization and curbing illicit financial flows, including offshore tax evasion and tax avoidance corruption. They must revise budgeting processes to provide overall support to SDG16+ priority areas, and create an "SDG16+ Challenge Fund" to help support civil society organizations working at the grassroots level to advance the ambitions of the agenda.
38. **Increase capacity building for implementation.** There are critical capacity gaps across all stakeholder groups working on SDG16+, especially at the grassroots level. It is essential to mobilize the necessary resources to meet these needs. All actors working to implement SDG16+ – including government bodies themselves – need their capacities built up if there is to be real change.
39. **Strengthen data, monitoring, and accountability.** Non-official data coming from civil society should be used alongside official data in order to ensure evidence-based results. Accountability processes must be timely, transparent, and participatory. SDG16 must be reviewed each year – just as SDG17.
40. **Promote inclusive participation and partnerships.** Civil society must be key actors in official policy-making, planning, budgeting, and reporting processes across goals and sectors, including VNRs and projects seeking social cohesion. It is especially important for local and grassroots organizations from the Global South to have a voice and an opportunity to engage in key policy fora as the HLPF on SDG implementation.
41. **Protect civil society and expand civic space.** Global trends show that civic space is shrinking. Human rights and justice defenders are increasingly under attack and last year was the most dangerous year on record. Civic space must be expanded to create an enabling environment in which civil society can freely and safely operate, assemble, and ensure accountability.

42. Take a people-centered approach to all of the above. People - including women, children, youth, and other marginalized and vulnerable groups - are at the heart of SDG16 implementation, and this needs to be reflected in our approaches on security, justice and social, economic and political inclusion.

Our collective commitment

43. Civil society organizations working on SDG16+ commit to the following actions to accelerate implementation. We will:
- a. Improve the evidence base of what works to reduce violence, build peace, strengthen governance institutions, and advance justice.
 - b. Continue to innovate and invest in scalable solutions to reduce violence, build peace, strengthen governance institutions, and advance justice.
 - c. Engage in collective advocacy to call for accelerated action on the 2030 Agenda and will hold other actors accountable for commitments made.
 - d. Call for support to uphold the necessary political space for civil society to play its role as trusted partner in realization of the 2030 Agenda.
 - e. Call for an annual review of SDG16 given its cross-cutting nature underpinning progress of the entire 2030 Agenda.
 - f. Call for a focus on leaving no one behind and that the furthest behind are reached first.
 - g. Continue to call for full inclusion and meaningful participation of all stakeholder groups in the realization of the 2030 Agenda.
 - h. Work together with peer organizations and all other key actors and stakeholder – including local communities.
 - i. Work together to collectively raise awareness on the importance of the 2030 Agenda and in particular the role of SDG16 therein.
44. Civil society organizations are ready to raise awareness, galvanize commitments, collaborate, track progress, and engage with and strengthen communities - especially those furthest behind. We pledge our efforts to make peace, justice, and inclusion come alive with and through our collective efforts and institutions by 2030.