

Workers and Trade Union Major Group Reflections on UNSG Ban Ki- Moon's synthesis report *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet*

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The UN Secretary General's Synthesis Report on the Post-2015 Agenda, *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet* was released on 4 December 2014. The report endeavours to make a synthesis of roughly two years of outputs from a multitude of processes set up to inform the Post-2015 agenda and intergovernmental negotiations set to kick off in January 2015. Some civil Society groups and governments have awaited the report with great anticipation, expecting that it would be an important contribution to the intergovernmental negotiations.

However, it seems clear that Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has, with good reason, taken a more cautious approach with the synthesis report, and delivered what is essentially, a *synthesis* of the important inputs to date. Those that may have hoped for a more assertive report will probably be disappointed, but otherwise the Secretary General has done a respectable job of pulling together the many inputs for the benefit of the intergovernmental negotiations without seeking to exert undue influence on the process.

The report is not entirely absent of recommendations, in particular in the area of Means of Implementation, but even here the Secretary General's report maintains a certain measure of neutrality which successfully reminds Member States of their commitments, obligations and responsibilities without breaching any unspoken boundaries. That said, the recommendations are by and large promising, in particular the attention given to the developmental role of the state and the obligation to ensure human and workers' rights. In the same vein, considering the attention given to the private sector so far in the post-2015 process, we particularly welcome the references to the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, core labour standards of the ILO, and United Nations Environmental standards. We also welcome the statement in the report that the public sector can raise significantly more revenue by reforming tax systems, fighting tax evasion, correcting inequities and combating corruption. However, a clear reference to progressive tax systems that are properly resourced and enforced is missing as well as policies that counter race-to-the-bottom tax incentives and tax competition policies on a regional basis.

The most provocative proposal in the report is the introduction of the "Six Essential Elements" to a transformational approach. It is difficult to interpret the value of this proposal or its eventual impact on the overall framework. It will largely depend on how it is

received by Member States. One interpretation could be that this proposal aims to organize the framework in a way that responds to the sceptics who have expressed concern over the number of goals and targets proposed by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. Though even if this is the intended purpose, clustering seventeen goals and close to 200 targets covering the three pillars of sustainable development, into six essential elements, will probably do little to simplify the agenda.

With regards to the priorities of the Workers and Trade Union Major Group, the synthesis report is neither a great achievement nor a serious disappointment. The report manages to make at least some reference to nearly all of the main priorities for the Workers and Trade Union Movement, Decent Work, Social Protection, Quality Education, Human and Workers Rights and Core Labour Standards though not always in the most convincing or accurate manner. Positively, the report makes a strong case for the ILO as a key UN agency in the implementation of the Post 2015 agenda.

There are, of course, some points to flag. In particular, the reports constant and a deliberate use of the term decent jobs in place of decent work. To the unaware this may seem an innocuous distinction, however, it would be hard to mistake the intent behind the choice of language. The implication is that the synthesis report fails to recognize the totality of the Decent Work Agenda and its four pillars-- job creation, workers' rights, social protection and the social dialogue. The term decent work is very clear, intergovernmentally agreed, and supported by a rights based framework in the Decent Work Agenda. Whereas the term decent jobs is often subject to erroneous interpretations. Only once does the phrase decent work appear in the synthesis report and only in reference to youth employment, which we support but it seems bizarre to limit the concept only to young people. The Secretary General's report should have taken greater care to use consistent language in this respect.

On social protection, the report remains vague and contains no reference to social protection floors as defined in the Bachelet Report, and the ILO Recommendation 202 that sets an international standard to be applied at national level.

It is important that the report acknowledges inequality, and income inequality in particular, but it offers little else beyond this general acknowledgement and the need to accommodate a list of often excluded groups. This could have been an opportune moment to emphasize the indispensable role the labour market institutions play in combatting income inequality and it failed to do so. Minimum wages, collective bargaining, strong and independent unions and other employment protections are critical for ensuring more equal societies and should be promoted by the synthesis report, especially given deliberate efforts by governments in many parts of the world to dismantle them. Inclusive growth does not happen without strong and functioning labour market institutions.

We welcome the recognition of the right to education and to safe learning environments, as both are far from ensured today and, indeed, central to any global agenda for sustainable development. The report frames high-quality education, lifelong learning and relevant skills as essential, but defines this narrowly by only referring to early childhood development through to post-primary education. Building on the MDG successes, the first OWG target on education rightly ensures free quality primary and secondary education for all boys and girls. The report should have recognized this as an important commitment and a step forward in ensuring the right to education.

The report rightly acknowledges the need for teachers to be given the means to provide quality education in safe learning environments. Beyond this, however, it remains unclear what the reference to teachers in the report actually means. The current target on teachers is insufficient to respond to many existing challenges, including the global shortage of trained and qualified teachers, which continues to undermine the right to quality education of millions of children and young people. The ambition of the post-2015 agenda must aim to ensure that all learners are taught by qualified, professionally-trained, motivated and well-supported teachers.

We are concerned that universal access to quality public services is not addressed sufficiently by the report, which is fundamental to building just and equitable societies. Market mechanisms have their place, but they have proven incapable of ensuring universal access, especially in countries/regions where there is not enough wealth to provide the 'risk-adjusted rates of return' of private corporations. However, there is a private interest

lobby at work, both in countries and in the UN which has identified public services as the next target for profit maximisation. The vast majority of privatisations and public-private partnerships do not deliver. We are also aware that the increasing returns to capital and the decreasing returns to labour mean that public services have an even greater role to play in social and economic stabilization and for reducing inequality. We want to see a stronger commitment to the delivery of public services, which is lacking.

We welcome the report's *Leave no one behind* approach and emphasize the importance of ensuring a specific goal on gender and mainstreaming a focus on gender equality across all goals and targets. WE support in particular the reports reference to equal pay for work of equal value". The new framework must also address the complex intersecting links between gender and other inequalities, including socio-economic status, for example to ensure the most vulnerable children are not excluded from quality education.

The report offers some of its most concrete suggestions in the area of accountability, monitoring and review of the Post 2015 framework. However, it is hard to see how the reports proposals will be more successful at leveraging behaviour change to achieve the goals and targets, over what has existed in the past. For our part, we have regularly insisted on a framework that ensures true accountability with a binding element in the vein of framework convention linked to the Right to Development. Following, a binding agreement an accountability system similar to the ILOs Supervisory Mechanism could be instituted.

These negotiations are taking place while in parallel an increasing number of free trade agreements grant excessive protection mechanisms to investors through Investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS), which can severely limit the policy options of governments. We hope that the post-2015 Development Agenda will provide a framework for the whole world beyond trade interests and create a new paradigm that applies to developed and developing nations alike.

There are a handful of references that are vague enough to be used as licence to undermine the work of the Open Working Group, which is and should remain the centrepiece of the post 2015 framework. The integrity of the Open Working Group proposals should not be challenged by efforts to consolidate the goals into a smaller, neater package, nor have the

overall ambition lowered through a technical alignment. While this may not be the intention, we still must be aware of the possibility. Overall, the Secretary General's synthesis report may underwhelm those who expected it to be more profound, but for the Workers and Trade Unions it represents a useful compendium, though not without flaws, to facilitate intergovernmental negotiations starting in January. It provides a well-rounded insight into the diverse processes and mobilizations which have taken place over recent years in the interest of shaping a definitive Post 2015 framework and will remain a valuable reference now and in the future.