

Workers and Trade Unions Major Group Statement on the 2018 High Level Political Forum

The 2030 Agenda is premised on the recognition of a mutual dependence of environmental, economic and social sustainability. Together with the Paris Climate Agreement and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, it provides the framework for achieving sustainable and resilient societies by means of a rights-based approach, which is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. Three years down the line, we are not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 - challenges remain to eradicate poverty, address climate change, ensure decent work as well as quality education, reduce inequalities and build peaceful, inclusive societies for all. Governments have committed to ensuring the realisation of the 2030 Agenda; yet, the 2018 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) reveals insufficient ambition as well as public financing, and lacks action-oriented commitment to overcome the obstacles to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

A zero-carbon, zero-poverty world is within our reach, but requires collective and inclusive efforts. Yet, the legitimate role of trade unions and workers to defend their rights, protect their interests and contribute to fairer societies is under attack worldwide. Trade unionists are targeted by intimidation, violence and even murder. This needs to be addressed throughout the 2030 Agenda process.

The current business model is not sustainable - from a social, an ecological nor an economics point of view. The transition to an inclusive zero-carbon economy will be socially just and sustainable only if workers' rights are guaranteed. The Workers and Trade Unions Major Group calls for a Just Transition, premised on an inclusive approach that brings together workers, communities, employers and governments in social dialogue to drive the concrete plans, policies and investments needed for a fast and fair transformation towards environmentally sustainable and socially responsible societies, that respect planetary boundaries. It focuses on jobs and ensuring that no one is left behind in the collective bid to reduce emissions, protect the climate and biodiversity and advance social and economic justice.

Furthermore, if governments are serious about addressing poverty and inequalities, wages and decent work must be at the center of the 2030 Agenda. The shrinking GDP share of wage is a worldwide reality that needs to be addressed urgently. A race to the bottom on tax and wages will not deliver a sustainable future. Gender-responsive and universally accessible free public education, health and social services, including for migrants and refugees, are essential to create sustainable economic and social development and combat poverty and inequalities.

An estimated USD 90 trillion investment is needed in infrastructure by 2030 to implement the SDGs. Workers and trade unions believe public investment, with public goods as a primary objective, presents the most adequate instrument to design and implement this effort. We are deeply concerned about the increasing privatisation of public services, including through public-private partnerships. These are by no means a fast track to SDG realisation but rather undermine quality, equity as well as human rights, and often incur additional costs in the long run. PPPs are inadequate and unsuccessful for essential and critical services - they privatise profits and socialise risks.

Furthermore, governments should support the regulatory and policy frameworks required to enable the private sector to contribute to the fulfilment of human rights and nationally defined 2030 Agenda objectives, in line with the public interest – especially where public resources are mobilised. For example, in the context of water, any contributions by the private sector should be expressly defined in legally binding agreements with explicit reference to the human right to water and sanitation for all as the primary goal for any such agreement.

Other important steps are needed: governments must ensure business transparency and accountability in investments, and create the necessary regulatory frameworks for companies to fulfil their 'due diligence' responsibilities, as prescribed by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Mechanisms for compensation must be put in place. Furthermore, governments need to close the gaps in the international tax system to ensure that corporations pay their fair share and avoid tax evasion.

On the solutions side, workers and trade unions highlight the key role of social dialogue as a driver and governance instrument for sustainable development. Social dialogue creates local ownership of the transition our societies need, builds societal consensus and inclusion, eases policy implementation, cements in agreed-upon measures and strengthens democratic processes. It has been at the core of development success-stories, both historically and in the present-day. Its role should be recognised and valued within 2030 Agenda implementation.

HLPF Reform

The review of the HLPF process comes at a crucial time to strengthen it, including the VNR process, so that it can be a true space for actionable political recommendations, in line with its mandate. Workers and Trade Unions recommend a stronger emphasis on financing in the HLPF discussions and outcomes, including the VNR process. As well as for the involvement of workers and trade unions in the 2030 Agenda planning and implementation at national level.

The Workers and Trade Unions Major Group welcomes the discussions on better integrating the regional dimension. There is still a lot of work to do to ensure that stakeholders have a voice at regional level. Nonetheless, we positively note some encouraging experiences in the last year. At global level, especially regarding the VNRs, improvement continues to be needed to allow civil society organisations, including trade unions, to meaningfully engage with governments on the content of review presentations.

Without an inclusive process at all levels, the goal of leaving no one behind will not be met. The 2030 Agenda recognises this and commits all actors to a multi-stakeholder approach.