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## Global SDGs Civil Society Networks: Response to the HLPF Review Zero Draft

This Zero Draft Response for the 2021 HLPF Review process outlines the recommendations for amendments to the Zero Draft of this resolution from four large-scale SDG civil society networks, including [Action for Sustainable Development](#), [Forus](#), [the Transparency, Accountability & Participation \(TAP\) Network](#) and [Together 2030](#). With our networks representing thousands of civil society organizations from around the world, these recommendations for the Zero Draft of the 2021 UN negotiations on HLPF Review have been based on extensive consultations with our Member Organizations, and are founded in several years of experiences in engaging in the HLPF and VNR processes at all levels, and decades of combined expertise in issues of global governance and multilateralism.

Overall, while the Zero Draft show significant improvements in relation to guidance for Member States around the Voluntary National Review processes, significant room for improvement remains in relation to language around the engagement of the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders, as well as a need for SDG16 to be reviewed at every HLPF session, similar to the annual review of SDG17. Without significant efforts to enhance stakeholder engagement at the HLPF, the HLPF and Member States risk undermining the HLPF's effectiveness and therefore its legitimacy and credibility in years to come - an outcome that should be avoided at all costs.

As four far-ranging CSO networks working to advance the SDGs, we remain steadfast in our commitment to improving the HLPF's working methods, in an effort to not only improve the effectiveness of the HLPF as a platform, but as a means of invigorating further actions and progress towards the 2030 Agenda. We stand ready and willing to engage in an HLPF that we hope is strengthened through this resolution, and we look forward to improvements made from this Zero Draft, as outlined in our recommendations below for Annex II of the Zero Draft on HLPF Review.

### I. Reviewing SDG16 Every Year at HLPF

#### ***Rationale:***

With SDG16 linked with all other SDGs, and with peaceful, just and inclusive societies underpinning the entire 2030 Agenda, SDG16 should be reviewed at every HLPF. Similar to SDG17 on the Means of Implementation, SDG16 targets can be viewed as outcomes themselves, but more importantly as enablers of progress towards the entire 2030 Agenda. Additionally, SDG16's focus on improving responsive governance, bolstering institutions at all levels and strengthening multilateralism are critical to implementing the 2030 Agenda, with these areas representing important issues that warrant a focus at the HLPF each year. Furthermore, given the 2030 Agenda's grounding in human rights, SDG16's focus on human rights and fundamental freedoms provides a direct link with the international community's work around human rights, another critical area where progress must be reviewed on an annual basis. Finally, the current themes of the 2022 and 2023 Zero Draft of the HLPF Review Resolution are directly linked with SDG16, with a focus on governance, institutions, justice and inclusion remaining critical to COVID-19 response and recovery.

This proposal for reviewing SDG16 at every HLPF was included in the drafts of the HLPF Review resolution from 2020, co-chaired by Georgia and Benin, with broad support from Member States. This proposal has also has broad support from civil society networks and groups, representing thousands of organizations, and has been referenced in multiple reports including the [Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+](#). It also has the support of the Global SDG16+ Community.

***Specific language suggestions on specific paragraphs of Annex II as follows:***

**Paragraph 6.** The high-level political forum on sustainable development shall continue to review a subset of Goals and their interlinkages, including with other Goals, at each session, with a view to facilitating an in-depth review of progress made on all 17 Goals over the course of a four-year cycle. Means of implementation including with respect to Goal 17, [and Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies with respect to Goal 16](#) shall be reviewed annually. [In addition to this annual review, the HLPF should strive to provide multi-stakeholder mechanisms that will strive to operationalize these enabling commitments in SDG16 and SDG17;](#)

**Paragraph 8.** For the remainder of the current cycle of the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, the sets of Sustainable Development Goals and areas/systems to be reviewed in-depth shall be:

- i. For 2022: Goals 4 (education), 5 (gender equality and women’s empowerment), 14 (oceans), 15 (terrestrial ecosystems), [16 \(peace, justice and inclusion\)](#) and 17 (Means of implementation and Global Partnership);
- ii. For 2023: Goals 6 (water), 7 (energy), 9 (infrastructure/industry), 11 (cities), [16 \(peace, justice and inclusion\)](#) and 17 (Means of implementation and Global Partnership);

## **II. Improving and Expanding Voluntary National Reviews**

***Rationale:***

The first cycle of the VNRs demonstrated a lack of consistency in the process, as well as limited engagement of civil society in a number of countries. Furthermore the piecemeal nature of many VNRs has often made comparative analysis difficult. Overall, there is therefore a need for a more systematic approach that ensures a central place for the principle of Leave No One Behind and delivers on the aspirations of a ‘whole of society’ approach, both throughout the VNR process at the national level, and at the global level through the HLPF.

Paragraphs 17-19 of the Zero Draft represent a significant step forward in outlining how to improve and expand the current VNR system, and the focus on the need for identifying follow-up actions from VNRs is both ambitious and necessary. The level of specificity included in these paragraphs should be maintained through any efforts by Member States to consolidate text, as it provides significant added-value for guiding how the VNR process could be carried out. With an ineffective VNR process going forward, the HLPF risks being perceived by governments and stakeholders alike as a wasted opportunity going forward.

***Specific language suggestions on specific paragraphs of Annex II as follows:***

**Paragraph 20.** The President of ECOSOC and the Bureau are encouraged to make the sessions interactive and conducive to discussions and peer-learning. Based on the VNRs, countries at the HLPF are encouraged to share constructive feedback, proposals and targeted recommendations to accelerate progress, including in written form. Countries conducting VNRs may also decide to provide written answers after the HLPF in case time was too short for them to provide detailed answers during the HLPF. Particular attention should be placed on ensuring sufficient time for questions from Major Groups and other Stakeholders, including through written questions;

**Paragraph 21.** The President of ECOSOC and the Bureau are invited to consider ways to allocate as much time as possible to the VNRs during the HLPF, including sufficient time for meaningful questions and answers, including between Member States and the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders, in order to strengthen interaction and peer learning. Countries conducting VNRs should also be given priority for their participation, on a voluntary basis, in HLPF side-events to allow for further interaction with all stakeholders;

### III. Improving and Expanding Stakeholder Participation and Fulfilling Commitment to Leave No One Behind

Civil society groups provide valuable expertise and insights which ensures a broader view of progress is included in the VNR and delivers on the commitment for a ‘whole of society’ approach. The inputs of CSOs enable diverse voices to be heard and provide valuable additional inputs that should be included on the official website for wider dissemination. While significant progress was made at the 2020 HLPF in providing virtual means of participation in sessions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the HLPF should build upon best practices and expand opportunities for virtual participation in the HLPF, in accordance with language from Resolutions 67/290 and 70/299 on utilizing web-based platforms for engagement. Without renewed commitments to “Leaving No One Behind” through the HLPF and this current Resolution, the HLPF and Member States risk losing credibility amongst the international community as an effective platform for advancing the 2030 Agenda. Finally, overall references to the commitment to Leaving No One Behind are sparse, and should be highlighted wherever possible.

Additionally, civil society spotlight/parallel reports can provide significant added-value into the official sessions of the HLPF, and can complement the official VNR reports produced by governments. With this background, national civil society reports should be showcased and disseminated on all online HLPF platforms, and should feature in interactive discussions during the VNRs and other sessions throughout the HLPF. Given the complementary nature of these civil society reports to VNR reports, by sidelining civil society reports, the HLPF risks painting a less-than-complete picture of progress in VNR countries, and overall global SDG progress.

#### ***Specific language suggestions on specific paragraphs of Annex II as follows:***

**Paragraph 37.** Reaffirming the provisions stipulated in paragraph 15 of resolution 67/290, which should be fully implemented, the high-level political forum should further enhance the participation of all major groups and other stakeholders in all aspects of its work, while retaining the intergovernmental nature of its discussions. Additionally, in accordance with paragraph 16 of resolution 67/290, recognizes the right of the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders to autonomously, including by ensuring should ensure meaningful participation of a diverse and inclusive range of ~~major groups and other stakeholders,~~

including marginalized groups. Additionally, sufficient time should be allocated for questions and comments to be shared by major groups and other stakeholders during the VNRs;

**Paragraph 38.** Countries are also encouraged to include major groups and other stakeholders in the preparations of their VNRs as well as in their delegations when presenting their voluntary national reviews at the HLPF, countries should engage with relevant coalitions and groups of stakeholders in a systematic and meaningful process of national consultation;

**Paragraph 39.** Major groups and other stakeholders are called upon to continue to report on their contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as provided for by paragraph 89 of resolution 70/1, and the Secretariat shall continue to compile and make available their reports. Furthermore all relevant national reports and inputs from stakeholders should be collected and included alongside VNRs on the official HLPF website. In addition to featuring these reports on the HLPF website, adequate time should be allocated to review and discuss these reports in HLPF official sessions.

