

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. MIROSLAV LAJČÁK, PRESIDENT OF THE 72ND
SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, AT THE OPENING OF THE
MINISTERIAL SEGMENT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT HLPF UNDER THE THEME:
“TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT SOCIETIES”
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Madam President, Maria Chatardová; Madam Deputy-Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed; Excellencies; Distinguished Delegates; Ladies and Gentlemen;

I am glad to be here, at this year’s High-Level Political Forum. And, I want to start my address with a simple message: we do not have any time to waste. So, I will get right to the point. Four points, in fact.

The first is that there is cause for celebration. Because, in many ways, the world is a better place, today, than it was just a few years ago. We have taken a sledgehammer to extreme poverty. Innovations in healthcare are allowing people to live longer and healthier lives. Fewer children are forced to work – and more are where they belong: in school. Electricity is spreading. In fact, the amount of people who can access it rose by 10 percent between 2000 and 2016. And, there is another reason to celebrate. Because, we – the international community – have never, before, made such ambitious commitments, to work together for humanity.

But we need to be realistic. And the reality is that there are huge challenges ahead. Which is my second point today. The gains made, against extreme poverty, have not benefitted everyone. In some parts of the world – particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa - people still live in conditions that most of us could not even imagine. While some of us have access to world-class hospitals and doctors, other people are still dying from diseases that can be cured or prevented. And, yes, more children are in school. But they are not always receiving quality education, which can equip them for a better life. Also, unbelievably, 1 in 6 people still do not have access to safe drinking water. Many women and girls, all over the world, remain excluded or oppressed. And, it is almost hard to believe that today – in the digital age –there are still people without electricity in their homes. In fact, nearly a billion of them.

Moreover, we know that our demands for water, food, energy and housing are already unsustainable. But they are set to worsen, as the world’s population grows. And, actually, it is expected to reach 8.6 billion by 2030 – and nearly 10 billion, by 2050. Meanwhile, the planet is, quite literally, melting. As we have heard, last year was one of the three hottest years on record. Yet, somehow, we still see pushback against efforts to fight climate change. So, there are causes for celebration. But there are even more causes for concern. And, things would look very bleak indeed, if we did not already have a plan to turn these trends around.

Now, as my third point, I want to reflect on what that would be like. What if we did not have the 2030 Agenda? What if there were no such things, as the Sustainable Development Goals? Well, I think the world would be a very scary place to live in. National governments would be scrambling to come up with strategies on their own – without a global master plan. Unilateralism, protectionism, and extremism would have even larger draws. And, we would be bracing ourselves for serious economic uncertainty and an environmental meltdown.

But, thankfully, that is not our reality. Because we decided to create an alternative one. Three years ago, we came together, in this very building, to chart a new course. We made the 2030 Agenda universal – so that we are all in it together. Instead of vague ideals, we set ourselves concrete goals and targets. And we designed a clear follow-up mechanism – to keep ourselves in check. Which brings us back to our meeting today. And I will focus on that, as my fourth and final point.

We are here to review how well we are doing, in implementing the SDGs. This is the third time we have done so. We are now one year away from the first major review, by the General Assembly, of our overall SDGs implementation. And we are meeting here at a time of great opportunity, given the reforms taking place throughout the United Nations system – which will affect our development work, on the ground. The goals we are focusing on, for this HLPF, deal with how we consume, produce, live, and work together. But we must take into account other, cross-cutting SDGs – as well as progress on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the Paris Climate Agreement.

And, before we begin, I want to point to a few areas in need of urgent attention. First, financing. There is no clearer way to say this: we do not have enough money to meet our goals. But it is out there. We just need to go beyond our traditional models to get it. Which means tapping into investments and capital flows. I held an event on financing last June. And, from it, I learned that there is huge interest, among businesses and other non-traditional donors. But we need to be more creative and proactive, in harnessing it.

Second, a cross-pillar approach. We can no longer operate along traditional lines. We need to tap into opportunities, like stronger conflict prevention, access to justice and human rights. This is how we create the conditions, for the SDGs to thrive. We also need to explore non-traditional options for financing and partnerships, for example artificial intelligence and communication technology.

Third, inclusion. And, here, we need to be very honest. All of our systems – whether at the United Nations or within national governments – were built by men, for men. Things are changing. But not fast enough. If we want to achieve the SDGs, we need far more leadership and participation from women. We also need to do more, to bring businesses, civil society representatives and regional actors to the table. And we need to open our doors much wider to young people. Here, I want to say that, when I invited young people into the United Nations in May, for a Youth Dialogue, they embodied the kind of innovations and ideas that we need, to move forward.

So, I will end here. And I will wish you all luck, in the discussions ahead. At the end of this High-Level Political Forum, 112 countries will have volunteered to present reviews of their work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. This makes up well over half of the United Nations' membership. So, it is clear we are committed. But commitment is not enough. We need to see results on the ground. And we have no time to waste.

Thank you.