

9 March 2019 Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals

Remarks by Mr. Michael Møller
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Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals

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New Synod Hall, Vatican City

Eminencies,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

It has been a great privilege for me to share the last two and a half days with all of you. I would like to congratulate every one of you for a very rich debate and a wonderful collaborative approach to the many issues we have tackled together. I have to tell you that this is one of the best conferences on SDG implementation and partnerships that I have attended in a while, and I go home with a renewed sense of optimism and purpose.

Allow me to once again express my sincere gratitude to His Eminence, Cardinal Turkson and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, as well as the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, for bringing us together.

Let me start by paraphrasing Secretary General Guterres when he gave his State of the World address at the beginning of this year. He described where we are right now in a very succinct way that encapsulates our challenge he said the problems we are facing are more and more connected and the solutions are more and more fragmented, and if we don't reverse that urgently we are going to be in even greater trouble than we are today. The challenge of reversing that seriously negative equation is what we have been discussing in many ways.

In our discussions over these past days, I was once again struck by the power of the 2030 Agenda to serve as a unifier, a truly global roadmap - and not just in terms of vision and values, but also in terms of fostering tangible action at the grassroots level.

The "values" part of equation was always very clear to me, but bears constant repetition. The "action" part is now the most urgent.

In both action and values, we are all after the same thing. And with the 2030 Agenda, we now have a blueprint to really integrate our efforts. This was crystal clear from both the substance and the tenor of this conference.

Food and water; health and climate; urbanization; energy; consumption; sustainable peace - the list of topics we tackled was broad and ambitious.

And with these explorations, we came closer to a deeper and more holistic understanding of the SDGs and their extraordinary ability to bring everyone on the same page and provoke a behavioural, even cultural, change that is very much needed.

The strength of these goals rests on three strong principles that speak to every one of us:

- The first one, to leave no one behind, the bedrock of the 2030 Agenda, was present in almost every discussion over the past two and a half days. That in itself is cause for optimism.

- The second one is just as strong, namely that the seventeen goals are indivisible and completely integrated. You cannot address one without addressing the other sixteen. We heard yesterday from one of our speakers that without peace we will not be able to implement the SDGs. That may be true in many cases, but it is even more true that without the full realization of the Sustainable Development Goals there will certainly be no peace. This reminds me of a quote by my old boss, Secretary General Kofi Annan, who never tired of pointing out that "there can be no peace without development, no development without peace, and neither of these without human rights." How right he was. Let that insight drive our actions and narrative as we move forward.

- The third principle is the powerful fact that we, every single one of us, are responsible for their implementation. These goals are not something that you can just sit back and expect governments to deliver on. If you do that, it will not happen. This is the role of a very different polycentric, multistakeholder effort, in which every faith, business, civil society organization, academic institution, media outlet, every citizen, man or woman, old or young have to be active participants. We must create entirely new kinds of partnerships, or we simply will not make it.

And we will not make it if we don't involve every single woman on our planet in this extraordinarily difficult and

complex endeavour. It's not rocket science, if we want to save our planet for succeeding generations we cannot afford to leave half of humanity outside of our efforts.

The last 70 years has brought us a level of prosperity and well-being that is unprecedented in human history. We live longer, we are healthier, we are better educated, etc. But we now have to deal with the cost of that progress – a sick planet, rising inequality, and a massive trust deficit, just to name a few. All of these issues and the new governance structures we have to put in place to resolve them is what the SDGs were designed to address and what our conversation over the past couple of days has been about and should continue to be about.

The sense of purpose, the obvious synergies that have come to the surface, and the very positive collaborative spirit that we have seen emerge gives hope and needs to be leveraged into further action on the ground.

The five working groups that we have just heard from have given us a number of actions that we collectively need to move on. I applaud these actions and fully subscribe to them. I would like to put forward a few more.

- I was impressed by the suggestion of our colleague Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia's that the Secretary General of the United Nations set up an inter-religious advisory group. This is an idea that makes a lot of sense. I will look into how this fits with the Multi Faith Advisory Council established by the UN General Assembly at the end of last year and how we can take it forward.

- I'd also like to draw your attention to and support the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes presented by my colleague Adama Dieng, the Special Representative of the Secretary General for the Prevention of Genocide. There are a lot of really great, practical suggestions for actions in that plan that all of you can and should take forward with your communities.

- We need to get better at our narrative. I would like to suggest to you, both as organizations and individuals, to help spread the word about the SDGs as a unifying plan of action. For example, I have suggested that his Holiness request that every single priest in every corner of the world mention the SDGs in his sermon every Sunday. This suggestion applies equally to all faith communities. You have incredibly powerful platforms as faith organizations. Speak to your communities, your families, your children, your neighbours, your colleagues. You are closest to the action at the grassroots level. You are the ones we have to rely on for lasting impact. To help you in your efforts, you will see on the screen the links to two publications that my office has produced and which have found great resonance, particularly with our younger audiences. In the Fairy Tales for a Fairer World we have taken a number of tales from around the world and adapted them to explain the SDGs. The 170 Daily Actions pamphlet gives the reader 10 suggestions for each of the 17 Goals for actions he or she can take in their personal lives to realize the SDGs. Please share them widely. If you would like to distribute printed versions, please let me know and we will send you the templates so you can have them printed.

- As we have agreed over the past days, we need new and innovative partnerships that leverage our respective strengths, break down silos, cast away our traditional competitive approaches, and thus increase the likelihood that we will have the needed impact. We can only make this happen together. It has been encouraging to hear about the many partnership initiatives like PaRD that are already in action. We need more of these and we need to strengthen and broaden the existing ones.

So we have now established a collaborative process between us and I hope to see it be taken forward in the months and years to come - and I am proud to be your partner in these efforts.

You have reinforced for me that it is not enough to mobilize minds around the SDGs, we must also mobilize hearts and souls. As teachers and guides, you are agents of change, and can inspire people to new levels of service and involvement. You can help bridge the chasms of ignorance, fear and misunderstanding that plague our world. And you can make our global actions resonate in the hearts and souls of individuals the world over.

Future generations may come to say of us that we never achieved what we set out to do. But it is up to us - to all of us - to make sure that they may never say that we failed because we lacked faith or permitted narrow self-interest, egoism, or short-sightedness to dilute our efforts.

So let us together close the gap between the world as it is now - and the world as we know it can and should be.

Thank you very much for these inspiring two and a half days. I leave a happy man. Have a safe trip home and see you soon.