



CSO Opening Statement

High-level Policy Segment: Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies in the ECE region (Agenda item 2), UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies, Geneva

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Thank you Chair.

My name is Anja Pedersen from YouAct.

I am here today to speak as a representative of civil society, as part of the Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism for this process, and to present the outcomes of the preparatory CSO Forum of yesterday. We met with 70 civil society representatives from diverse constituencies and sub-regions. Unfortunately there have been fewer participants than last year due to funding constraints, but nevertheless an increased engagement and motivation.

I would like to start by giving thanks to my colleagues from civil society, for choosing me to be their voice. I was supported to do this, as the representative of youth but also as the representative of an organisation working to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights. These rights are often invisible, that is, unless they are being challenged.

Take as an example the #metoo movement, which is making visible, what has too long been invisible: that we live in a world where violence, harassment and discrimination based on gender is common and in some cases accepted. But it is of course unacceptable that **1 in 5** women in globally have or will suffer physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.

For each and every one of the 17 goals, there are right holders, who are not having their rights met. Just to name a few: persons with disabilities, youth, older persons, LGBTQIA, homeless, informal workers, migrants and refugees. Here I will focus on the right holders affected by the lack of implementation of the goals, which are up for review this year.

In relation to SDG 6, we have to acknowledge that we are currently leaving behind the rural populations of our region. Despite the policy processes at UNECE such as the protocol on water & health, we have seen hardly any progress for 20 years. This is not to mention, how we fail young women and girls, when they are on their periods. The lack of safe sanitation in schools makes many girls to skip school. Homeless women are forced to use unsanitary solutions. In addition, privatisation of water provision has shown its limits, and we need to strengthen public ownership and regulation of this common good.

In relation to SDG 7, our region's energy sector is one of the world's biggest polluter and causes six-hundred-thousand deaths annually due to air pollution. The nuclear energy sector poses increasing risks to the region, including from the unsolved problem of nuclear waste. We urgently need to transform our energy systems to zero fossil fuels by eliminating fossil fuel subsidies, while ensuring a just transition for workers and communities.

In relation to SDG 11, We need bottom-up participation, transparency and accountability in urban planning, The needs of vulnerable people should be taken into account and supported by disaggregated data collection. Adequate gender inclusive planning and budgeting is key to make sure cities provide safe public spaces free of gender-based violence. We are concerned about accountability of the private sector, particularly when a project fails. How do we ensure that innovative finance, including PPPs, act in the best interests of the people? Civil society should be included in decision-making, implementation and monitoring of urban projects. All PPPs should comply with human rights standards and contribute to poverty reduction. Women, older persons, persons with disabilities, or homeless people, are affected disproportionately when cities and communities are non-inclusive, inaccessible and unsafe.

In relation to SDG 12, we face a huge challenge in our region, which mainly consists of societies that keep consuming more and more. We need to decrease our resource consumption in absolute terms. Achieving SDG 12 is not just about fostering innovation and making consumers aware, but about systemic change, about changing the growth paradigm and finding a new balance in a post-growth society and economy that offers decent jobs and fulfills the needs of people within the caring capacities of the planet. On that note, the canteens of the UN should stop selling plastic bottles!

In relation to SDG 15, we need embrace that many UNECE countries are champions on environment. Governments should raise ambition on biodiversity protection and drive transformational change through the integration of biodiversity into social, economic and climate policies among others. This year's HLPF represents a unique opportunity to draw the attention of policy-makers and the general public on biodiversity and other environmental issues, to highlight their essential role for our survival.

All the above mentioned measures need inclusion of and cooperation with civil society to ensure the full implementation of all SDGs. The lessons from the region show, that the level of inclusion of civil society in SDG implementation varies

greatly, including in the VNR process. We encourage governments and donors to engage directly with local authorities and civil society to support implementation on the ground.

We call for all of the UNECE countries, to support CSO involvement in the implementation and review of the SDGs. This way, we continue to ensure that invisible issues are being brought to the fore and the voices of all will be heard and acted upon.

Thank you.