

14 March 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,  
President of the 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the First Meeting of the Open Working Group of the General  
Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals**

Mr. Secretary-General,  
Respected Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish you all a warm welcome to the first session of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals. It is my great honor to call to order its inaugural meeting, following months of informal consultations.

I would like to thank our co-facilitators, Ambassador Csaba Körösi, the Permanent Representative of Hungary, and Ambassador Macharia Camau, the Permanent Representatives of Kenya, for their leadership and hard work.

I also extend my heartfelt appreciation to Ambassador Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, the Permanent Representative of Brazil, for her enormous efforts in bringing us to this point. I also thank my Senior Special Adviser, Ambassador Dejan Šahović, for his generous help.

Excellencies,

The process of formulating the SDGs will undoubtedly be a complicated one, requiring great diplomatic skill.

According to the terms of the Rio+20 concluding document, the Group will have to submit a proposed list of SDGs to the 68th Session of the General Assembly.

By the third quarter of 2014, the Member States should be in a position to promulgate the Sustainable Development Goals—the single-most important element of the post-2015 agenda.

The framing principles of the SDGs have already been clearly established by world leaders. I refer to paragraph 75 of the Rio+20 concluding document, adopted in the plenary as resolution 66/288 and entitled ‘The Future We Want.’ The SDGs will need to be formulated in a manner that comprehensively integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development namely economic, social, and environmental into a single, fully coherent whole.

In accordance with paragraph 247 of the same document, they will also need to be “action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate; limited in number; aspirational; global in nature; and universally applicable to all countries.”

Excellencies,

I strongly believe that fulfilling the MDGs should be the starting point of our endeavors. We must eradicate extreme poverty in all its forms over the next decade or so.

Ensuring food security and sustainable agricultural practices, as well as reducing inequality, need to be prioritized just as much. So should putting an end to various forms of discrimination. It is not only a moral imperative of our times, but is perhaps the most effective way societies can harness the full productive potential of large shares of their populations. It is just one of the reasons why we require a global blueprint for combating youth unemployment, as well.

The environmental dimension of the sustainable development agenda is arguably the most convoluted one. I believe addressing it should become a core national interest of every Member State. In my view, it can no longer just be left to climate change negotiators. Environmental issues need to be embedded in the worldviews of top diplomats and become an integral part of the SDG process.

To safeguard the world from runaway climate change, we will need to de-couple economic growth from our dependence on carbon-based energy systems. I see no other effective option on the horizon. Continuing to build the global economy on fossil fuels would likely destroy our hopes to achieve sustainability.

All of this will require not just the involvement of governments, but the body politic as a whole. The Rio+20 concluding document provides for the inclusion of business leaders as well as the scientific community, in addition to IFIs and civil society representatives. It also underscored that the SDG process will require significant mobilization of financial resources.

The deliberations of the Open Working Group should aim to establish a new form of global engagement, whose scope may very well be difficult to grasp. Yet in less than two years, that is exactly what needs to happen.

Excellencies,

In ‘The Future We Want,’ world leaders called on the General Assembly to “further integrate sustainable development as a key element of the overarching framework for United Nations activities, and adequately address sustainable development in its agenda-setting, including through periodic high-level [events].”

I took these words to heart as I was choosing topics for the thematic debates that will take place during the resumed part of the 67th Session.

On April 15th, one will be held on the “UN and Global Economic Governance,” which will focus on how significant economic actors, including the G20, may interact with the rest of the world in the future.

On May 16th, there will be a thematic debate on “Sustainable Development and Climate Change: Practical Solutions in the Energy-Water Nexus.” It will be organized in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates and the newly established United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network spearheaded by the Director of its Secretariat, Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University.

On June 12th, the General Assembly will come together to discuss “Culture for Sustainable Development,” in collaboration with UNESCO.

On June 26th, a thematic debate on “Entrepreneurship for Development” will take place, in partnership with the State of Israel the sponsor of the resolution that mandated its occurrence.

A few weeks later, on July 8th, another one will be held on “Social Inequality,” with the help of the Organization of American States.

In accordance with resolution 67/203, I will also organize a series of one-day workshops on the development, transfer, and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies and their linkages to sustainable development.

I avail myself of the opportunity to invite Member States to participate at the highest possible level in these events, each of which could provide valuable inputs to the deliberations that are beginning today.

Excellencies,

In stressing the need for an inclusive sustainable development framework, the Rio+20 concluding document assigned distinct responsibilities to a number of stakeholders within the UN system.

In addition to tasking us with adopting the SDGs, it mandated the plenary to oversee two other critical elements of the post-2015 agenda.

The first is the Intergovernmental Process to Propose Options for an Effective Sustainable Development Financing Strategy. I have appointed Ambassador Byrganym Aitimova, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, and Ambassador Geir Pedersen, Permanent Representative of Norway, as facilitators for achieving this task.

The second is the High-level Political Forum to Follow-up on the Implementation of Sustainable Development. I have appointed Ambassador Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Permanent Representative of Brazil, and Ambassador Cesare Rapaglini, Permanent Representative of Italy, as facilitators for discussions on its future role. The Forum should build on the strengths, experience, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development, a subsidiary body of ECOSOC, and ultimately replace it.

The mandate conferred upon the Economic and Social Council in Rio de Janeiro to help “achiev[e] a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development” paves the way for its active participation in setting the post-2015 agenda.

In addition, the Secretary-General’s 27-member High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, which was created in the wake of the Rio+20 Conference, is slated to present the concluding report on its findings before this summer. Later this month, I will attend its fourth meeting, which will take place in Bali, Indonesia. Upon my return, I will organize a briefing in the General Assembly, giving Member States an opportunity to express their views, in accordance with established practice.

Each of the work streams to which I have referred are in the service of conceptualizing the post-2015 agenda. I believe that effectuating a smooth transition from the MDGs to the SDGs should be a critical aspect of their deliberations.

I therefore attach great importance to the preparations for the Special Event to Follow-up on Efforts towards Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which will be held on September 25th, during the High-level Segment of the General Debate of the 68th Session. I have appointed Ambassador Anne Anderson, Permanent Representative of Ireland, and Ambassador Kingsley Mamabolo, Permanent Representative of South Africa, to facilitate its preparations.

It will be the final occasion for world leaders to decide on actions that need to be taken to complete the MDG process, and for them to provide guidance to the Secretariat and other stakeholders on the priorities they will need to focus on as the deadline approaches.

I believe its outcome should be as substantive as possible, feeding directly into the discussions of not only the Open Working Group, but that of the High-level Political Forum and ECOSOC more generally, as well as the Intergovernmental Process for an Effective Sustainable Development Financing Strategy. Issues that will likely be raised at the Special Event are also being considered by the Secretary-General’s High-level Panel, in accordance with its Terms of Reference.

As we move forward, we will need to ensure that the activities of each of these actors are mutually reinforcing and complementary. Their actions must ultimately converge into a single, fully cohesive whole.

In the time ahead, I will follow their progress closely. It is critically important that their work is coordinated, and that there is no duplication of effort. I stand ready to help this to the best of my ability, and will conduct a series of informal consultations to that end.

Excellencies,

Your task is truly daunting, for I believe your report to the 68th Session of the General Assembly will help frame much of the UN’s work for decades to come.

It should provide authoritative guidance for preparing the world for the grand re-organization of human affairs.

If we are to survive on this planet for more than just a few generations, we have to be bold, audacious, and visionary in the Goals we set.

The time for half-measures has passed, and the business-as-usual ways need to be put aside, for inadequate action today will inevitably lead to harsh judgment and recrimination tomorrow.

Excellencies,

We are about to embark on a journey into a great unknown. The world has rarely done anything quite so difficult as what you are asked to accomplish.

I personally believe that never before have we had to face such a complex and interdependent set of existential challenges.

In my view, defining the post-2015 development agenda is about crafting a new global partnership in which no nation is left behind, and no country opts out.

If ever a true, aspirational consensus has been needed in the United Nations, it is now. We must come together in common cause, with a single purpose: to make a universal transition to sustainability in a way that equitably addresses the needs of humanity for the 21st century.

Thank you very much for your attention.