

SDG 16. During the past twelve months, inequalities have continued to rise, accompanied by increased food insecurity and poverty.

Today, the challenges we face have become even more complex. Peace, the basic requirement for sustainable development, has been challenged more than ever. The path to recovery from the global economic crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has been further complicated by the conflict in Ukraine. Reaching and supporting the most vulnerable should be a key focus of all government policies.

Distinguished participants, two years of the pandemic have also taken a toll on public institutions, both directly and through the impact of increasingly limited fiscal space in most countries. Health systems have been weakened and education has suffered irreparable damages. Yet, effective public institutions are more needed than ever – they are the cornerstone of national responses to emergencies. They are responsible for mitigating crises and continuing to deliver public services; they are expected to respond effectively to the need of citizens, especially in times of crisis.

How to make institutions better prepared and more resilient to shocks should be a key concern in all countries. Improving the resilience of public institutions must be anchored in a multi-pronged strategy. It calls for mobilizing data and science, incorporating foresight exercises into planning, and equipping public organizations and their staff with the right competences and skills.

It requires effective collaboration across government departments and levels of government; ensuring transparency and accountability around crisis response and beyond; and fighting corruption. But building effective public institutions goes beyond internal coherence. It requires engagement and innovation from other parts of the society, a fact that the pandemic has made clear.

Transforming governance and public institutions in this way is, undoubtedly, a tall order. Yet, during the past two years innovations have multiplied to make public institutions more effective, and in some cases more inclusive. Public servants have played a critical role during the pandemic. Many countries have quickly adopted digital government tools. But we have to work harder to bridge the digital divides and make digital government a positive force for inclusion.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hope that your deliberations will distil useful lessons from policy changes made by countries during the pandemic to:

- *establish universal social protection systems,*
- *provide legal identity to all,*
- *enhance access to education, housing and decent work opportunities for those in vulnerable situations, and*
- *increase digital inclusivity.*

I also look forward to your concrete ideas for accelerating gender equality, building on forward-looking initiatives on the repeal of gender-discriminatory laws, changing damaging social norms, and greater engagement of women in all spheres of decision-making, as well as eradicating violence against women and girls.

Distinguished participants, the critical importance of SDG 16 to a successful recovery from the present pandemic and for building resilience to future crises, cannot be emphasized enough. The world has less than 9 years to implement the ambitious 2030 Agenda. Advancing SDG16 will help us not only to build back better, but also accelerate progress on all the SDGs. This conference represents a unique opportunity to make it happen.

I am pleased to see that many leaders from governments, international organizations, civil society and academia have joined us for these two days. This multi-stakeholder setting will, I am sure, greatly help advance our understanding of opportunities, as well as lessons learned, to move forward Sustainable Development Goal 16.

I thank you.
