



**INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION
STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL, MS JAN BEAGLE**

SDG 16 CONFERENCE

TRANSFORMING GOVERNANCE FOR A MORE PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE FUTURE:

SDG 16 AS THE ROADMAP TO RESPOND TO COVID-19 AND BUILD BACK BETTER

Opening Remarks

28 April 2021

Vice Minister Sereni,
Under-Secretary General Liu,
Ambassador Marrapodi,
Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,
Friends and Colleagues,

On behalf of IDLO, it is a pleasure to welcome you to the second Global SDG 16 Conference.

I would like to thank the Government of Italy and DESA for their continued partnership, at a critical moment for SDG 16, and the entire 2030 Agenda.

At first glance, the targets of Goal 16, ranging from reducing violence, ensuring legal identity, eliminating corruption, and improving access to information, have little in common.

What unites them into one cohesive whole is the concept of good governance, based on the rule of law and human rights.

The principles of equality, and non-discrimination, the focus on effective institutions and participatory decision-making, and the commitment to leaving no one behind - which are at the core of Goal 16 - are also interwoven across the other SDGs.

It is these common threads, which come together to form a vision of development that is inclusive, just and sustainable, that make the 2030 Agenda truly transformative.

As we take stock of progress on SDG 16, and explore ways to accelerate it in the face of the pandemic, allow me to share three observations, drawing on IDLO's experience.

First, COVID-19 is putting governance at all levels to the test.

To successfully meet this challenge, our response must be based on the rule of law.

We face not just a public health emergency, but a political, social and economic crisis of historic proportions.

Some have resorted to broad, authoritarian measures, using the pandemic as a pretext.

Laws and institutions are being used to limit people's rights, narrow the space for debate, and avoid scrutiny of public decisions.

Such actions will ultimately only increase fragility, and delay a sustainable recovery.

The sheer magnitude of the crisis requires choices and tradeoffs that traditional instruments of governance are ill-equipped to make.

Unprecedented resources have been mobilised to provide relief and social protection.

However, as the uneven and inequitable rollout of vaccines shows, structural inequalities and insufficient consultation and transparency have often undermined the effectiveness of such initiatives.

This has further eroded already low levels of public trust.

The world is experiencing a crisis of confidence in public institutions at a time we need them most.

Effectively managing the COVID-19 response, protecting human rights, and implementing the 2030 Agenda are ultimately one and the same challenge.

The rule of law is critical to this effort.

It can protect the least powerful and give them a voice in the debate, helping build trust.

It can enable governments to act quickly and decisively, through effective laws and institutions.

It can help decision makers to balance competing interests fairly and transparently.

And it can help ensure that relief efforts benefit intended recipients by preventing corruption.

Over the past year, IDLO has been working with partners in over 30 countries to promote such a rule of law-based response to the pandemic. Many of them are here at this Conference and we look forward to learning from their experiences.

My second point is that we need to prioritise those who are most at risk of being left behind.

COVID-19 is exacting an enormous cost: in human suffering, in lives and in wasted potential. Its brunt has been borne by the poorest and most vulnerable.

The impact on women and girls has been particularly devastating, threatening to roll back decades of hard-won gains on gender equality.

Tackling the multiple and intersecting layers of discrimination faced by women and girls, and others living in conditions of exclusion, requires effective laws and policies.

It requires empowering those living at the margins of society with the knowledge and tools they need to claim their rights.

In other words, it requires the rule of law.

My third and final point is that the crisis also represents a unique opportunity for achieving the vision of the 2030 Agenda.

The pandemic found a world teetering on the brink of change.

By disrupting life as we know it, by accelerating the adoption of digital innovation, and by shining a merciless light on our shared fragility, COVID-19 has decisively shattered the status quo.

We now face fundamental choices as individuals, as societies, and collectively as one human family, about the kind of future we want to build.

We can choose the path of narrow self-interest, or we can choose to work together in a renewed spirit of solidarity and multilateralism.

The 2030 Agenda represents both humanity's highest aspirations and our best hope for success. SDG 16 remains the essential enabler of transformative change.

Effective laws and institutions can promote inclusive economic recovery, strengthen preparedness for future crises, and help us transition to a greener and more climate resilient development model.

This conference is an opportunity to build greater momentum, and increased political and financial support for SDG 16, and a rule of law-based recovery from the pandemic.

It is also an opportunity to learn from each other.

I am delighted to have with us such a distinguished and diverse set of speakers, working on the frontlines of pandemic response and recovery efforts.

After living through over a year of a crisis that has challenged us to adapt and innovate, no one has all the answers. But all of us, I am sure, have part of the answer.

Working together, I am confident that we can overcome the challenges of the present moment and deliver a roadmap for a rule of law-based recovery.

The International Development Law Organization (IDLO) enables governments and empowers people to reform laws and strengthen institutions to promote peace, justice, sustainable development and economic opportunity.