

WFWPI's High-Level Political Forum 2021 was under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council

Mako Mori

July 15, 2021

WFWPI Office For UN Relations, NYC, USA



This year's High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2021 was held from July 6 to 15, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council.

The HLPF on sustainable development is the core United Nations platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The theme for this year's HLPF was: "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development."

This year, the HLPF discussed ways to ensure a sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19 that puts us on track to realize the 2030 Agenda.

The HLPF 2021 discussed the following SDGs: 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate action, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships in depth. All 17 SDGs are recognized by the UN leadership as being inextricably linked, and progress or setbacks on one affects the others.

The second week of HLPF focused on the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), in which 42 local governments shared reports about their country's progress on the SDGs. The VNRs facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with the purpose of accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The recurring statements made throughout HLPF was the unfortunate fact that COVID-19 had reversed the progress towards the 2030 Agenda. The extreme poverty rate rose for the first time in a decade, with now over 124 million considered living in poverty. Many other issues, concerning economic growth, increased inequalities and climate action, which were initially making progress, had been backtracked and exacerbated by the pandemic. The representatives of nations shared about the drastic complications COVID-19 had on their country's progress towards the 2030 Agenda, while reaffirming their commitments to learn from this lesson and get back on track.

Civil society voiced their disappointment to the UN leaders, saying that "although COVID-19 did not aid in advancing the goals, we must remember that even before the pandemic, we were not on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030." Civil society was adamant that the pandemic cannot be used as an excuse for the failure to meet the goals and called for more proactive measures.

Recommitments to empower women and include gender-responsive responses were also discussed in the ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the 2021 session of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum on sustainable development. The leadership supported this statement by mentioning "National responses to the COVID 19 pandemic must be gender-responsive and integrate women's participation and leadership and ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women and girls..."

Also in the ministerial declaration was the recognition of the indivisible link between sustainable development and peace and security. One will be at risk without the other and it is vital that we continue to invest heavily in both, for the safety of the world's most at-risk from the consequences of climate change.

The last HLPF meeting raised a major concern on the topic concerning the long-term impact of policies to respond to COVID-19 and its impacts, especially on the SDGs. Due to the panic caused by the pandemic, governments have made short-term decisions rather than decisions based on a sustainable future. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterre, reiterated that the "response to the COVID-19 pandemic should not only be guided by emergency concerns. It is important to reflect on how the policy measures being taken today can shape a better future." The vast majority of financial stimulus packages in response to the pandemic are not yet focused on longer-term measures and sustainable investments.

Although there were no concrete plans of how to track the long-term impact of the COVID-19 stimulus packages, Guterre raised a concern that could prevent future backtracking progress for the SDGs. This post-COVID-19 era taught us the importance of developing more preventative measures and sustainable recovery plans. We may not be able to prevent another pandemic, but we can be much more equipped to recover from economic, social and environmental calamities, while ensuring the safety of our world's most vulnerable.