

Top-Level Forum: High Hopes and Tension with WFWPI's Strong Presence

Mario L. de Leon Jr.
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Senior Adviser for Diplomacy, WFWPI UN Relations



WFWPI delegates at the 2025 HLPF.

New York - The 2025 HLPF reflected both optimism and tension. While the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration demonstrated a shared commitment to sustainable development, the divided votes illustrated persistent geopolitical fractures. Nevertheless, WFWPI's strong presence and proactive engagement - in areas ranging from gender equity and climate education to digital empowerment and youth participation - underscore its growing influence as a civil society actor dedicated to bridging global priorities and declarations with local and community-driven action.

With the theme: Advancing Sustainable, Inclusive, Science and Evidence-Based Solutions for the 2030 SDGs, the HLPF went on from July 14 - 24, 2025 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.



HLPF Ministerial meeting

A. Overall Outcome

The HLPF concluded on a substantive and encouraging note with the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration on July 23. In a departure from past practice, the entire text was subjected to a roll-call vote, highlighting emerging divisions among Member States. The Declaration was adopted with 154 votes in favor, 2 against, and 2 abstentions.

A separate vote was conducted earlier on Paragraph 14, which contained the contested phrase "unhindered access to essential medicines and vaccines." An amendment proposed by 52 countries led by the United Kingdom sought to revise the language. However, the amendment was rejected by a vote of 99 against, 52 in favor, and 2 abstentions, thus retaining the original text.

On July 24, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) formally adopted the same declaration. ECOSOC President H.E. Bob Rae of Canada observed that the voting process reflected ongoing global geopolitical and

socioeconomic divides, stating that "differences of opinion cannot be ignored in a world marked by

fragmentation, disruption, and inequality."

UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Li Junhua, underscored the challenges ahead, noting that only 35% of SDG targets are on track, while 18% are regressing. This stark reality aligns with findings from the Financing for Development 4 (FfD4) fact sheet, which reported that major donor countries are providing, on average, only 0.37% of their Gross National Income (GNI) as Official Development Assistance (ODA) - well below the 0.7% target needed to finance the SDGs effectively.



Amb. de Leon with WFWPI delegates to the HLPF at the VNR Lab session.

B. SDGs in Focus

HLPF 2025 reviewed progress five Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being; SDG 5: Gender Equality; SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth; SDG 14: Life Below Water; and SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals.

Numerous interventions by Member States and civil society organizations (CSOs) stressed the need to prioritize the needs of underserved and marginalized populations, reaffirming the Ministerial Declaration's pledge to "leave no one behind." Several speakers also emphasized that SDG 5 (Gender Equality) is foundational to progress on all other SDGs under review.

The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) presented by 39 countries focused primarily on national-level progress. A recurring concern across many reports was the inadequacy of ODA and limited domestic resources, which continue to hinder efforts to meet the 2030 targets. Countries widely acknowledged the need to operationalize and scale up the financing commitments agreed at FfD4 in Sevilla, Spain.



Amb. de Leon with WFWPI interns, Shin Won Barlaan, Akshay Sapkale, and Bhavu Vasishta.

C. WFWPI's Participation

The WFWPI fielded one of the largest NGO delegations to HLPF 2025, according to Merly Barlaan, Director of UN Relations for WFWPI in New York. The delegation consisted of at least 16 accredited representatives, including youth volunteers and trainees, who participated in the official proceedings and various side events.

Notable Activities:

Side Event - July 15: "Sexual Harassment as a Barrier to Achieving the SDGs"

Co-hosted by WFWPI and the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace (IAYSP), the session addressed systemic barriers to achieving gender equality. Barlaan delivered a compelling intervention emphasizing the importance of family-centered values in preventing sexual harassment in both professional and social settings.

Parallel Event - July 23: MOU Signing with Cebu Institute of Technology - University (CITU)

Held at the New Yorker Hotel, this event launched the initiative "Mainstreaming Permaculture Education for Climate Action." The MOU was signed by Ms. Barlaan and Engr. Bernard Villamor, President of CITU. I had the privilege of delivering the closing remarks, highlighting the importance of translating this partnership into measurable, community-based SDG implementation.

Strategic Partnership - Digital Coordination:

WFWPI signed an MOU with Headway BPO to enhance connectivity and coordination among its 128 chapters worldwide. The agreement, signed by Ms. Barlaan and Mr. Anupam Dutta, CEO of Headway BPO, leverages digital tools to expand WFWPI's global outreach and operational efficiency.

Youth Engagement - July 23:

WFWPI's UN representatives, led by Ms. Barlaan, participated in the Pitch Competition at the Tzu Chi Center, where she also served as one of the judges. The group also held a productive exchange with Mr. Steve Chiu, Tzu Chi's Representative to the UN.



Amb. Mario L. de Leon Jr. with daughter Christine.

D. Strategic Engagements

In addition to WFWPI's own initiatives, I participated in two strategic side events of broader significance:

A high-level discussion on revitalizing multilateralism as a key instrument for SDG advancement.

A forum highlighting the role of ECOSOC Regional Commissions in supporting and accelerating national SDG implementation.

The observations raised in both forums can be used by WFWPI for shaping its future engagements in the UN system.