

SDG16+ In Peril: "A call-to-action for safeguarding commitments to Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies"

HLPF 2022

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BACKGROUND

The 2022 Rome SDG16 Conference was co-organized by IDLO, UNDESA and the Government of Italy, to explore how a people-centered approach to governance can help rebuild trust, accelerate progress towards sustainable development and tackle the challenges facing a post-COVID world. Hundreds of civil society organizations came together to support the 2022 Rome SDG16 Conference, [“SDG16+ in Peril: An urgent call-to-action for safeguarding commitments to Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies”](#). This [2022 Rome Declaration](#) is a follow-up to the [2019 and 2021 versions of the Rome Civil Society Declaration](#) that raises the alarm on the further backsliding of SDG16+ and highlights what civil society stakeholders have identified as key areas where action is needed for peaceful societies to prosper.

The **virtual and interactive side-event at the 2022 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)** hosted by Namati, the TAP Network, CSPPS, CIVICUS, GPPAC and IDLO, explored the myriad of issues and recommendations outlined through the 2022 Rome SDG16 Conference, as well as the 2022 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+, and showcased the practical experiences of local civil society partners and their leadership role in advancing SDG16+.

SUMMARY

The event began with a welcome by John Romano, TAP Network Coordinator, where he provided an overview of the global context and the importance of the Rome Civil Society Declaration. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, progress towards SDG16+ has been slow and uneven – and in many cases backsliding. On top of this, global trends and forces continue to work against peaceful, just and inclusive societies, with political will from governments fading, closing civic space, and exclusion on the rise. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed unique pressures on the world’s governing institutions, presenting once-in-a-generation challenges for all, while exacerbating existing global, existential challenges. Additionally, urgent and ongoing threats to peace and security and international law have emerged in recent months and years, especially surrounding Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. With authoritarianism on the rise, the 2030 Agenda commitments on inclusive, responsive and participatory decision making, along-with respect for access to information and fundamental freedoms have also assumed greater significance. However, there continue to be challenges and gaps that need to be addressed, and the agenda as a whole demands greater commitment from governments.

Following this contextualization, the event heard from the following speakers who reflected on the Rome SDG16 Conference and Declaration:

- **Fabio Cassese**, Director-General of Italian International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
- **Maria Francesca Spatolisano**, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, UNDESA
- **Jan Beagle**, Director-General of IDLO
- **Charlotte Kerting**, Program Officer, Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS)

FABIO CASSESE: *DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF ITALIAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION*

Mr. Cassese emphasized that the Italian government has sought to keep implementation of SDG16 high on the international agenda, in spite of these challenging times. He went on to state that no one better than civil society understands and represents the instances of those who face consequences from the lack of justice, lack of access to fundamental rights, exclusion, inequalities, and corruption; thus, civil society testimony and actions can promote better knowledge of the period we face. Mr. Cassese reiterated that Italy has been proud to host the Rome Conference since its inception, and that it has become a landmark for all those working in peacebuilding. He noted that the Rome Declaration was very comprehensive and punctual in underlying the main messages we need to deliver, and that Italy looks forward to further discussions in order to organize the conference in 2023.

MARIA FRANCESCA SPATOLISANO: *ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR POLICY COORDINATION AND INTER-AGENCY AFFAIRS, UNDESA*

After highlighting the current global context, especially the war in Ukraine, Ms. Spatolisano recalled that the world is currently facing the largest number of violent conflicts since World War II, with over a quarter of the global population living in conflict-affected zones. This context reflects the need for the Rome Declaration. She emphasized the importance of moving forward around the declaration regarding the participation of women and youth, access to information, increased collaboration, the use of technology, and a systematic approach towards good governance principles. Ms. Spatolisano concluded with the importance of having vibrant civil society engagement; engaging with all the SDG16+ stakeholders is key to any progress, contributes to keeping the visibility of SDG16 principals high, and this is very important as SDG16 is a fundamental underpinning of sustainable development.

JAN BEAGLE: *DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ASSOCIATION*

Ms. Beagle began her remarks by stressing the need for urgency of action within the 2030 agenda. Remarking on the currently crises and global context as well as the backsliding of SDG implementation, she expressed that we have both a moral duty and an overwhelming self-interest to reverse those trends. Ms. Beagle reminded the audience that while the assumptions based upon which the Conference was created for the first time were that the global community had the choice to decide to do things differently and break from the destructive practices of the past, not enough progressive changes have been made. She went on to note that there is a place for cautious optimism moving forward, that change is possible, and that we must carry on with energy and enthusiasm in order to act swiftly for our collective future. To this point, she emphasized the importance of meaningful collaboration with civil society in ensuring progress on implementation of the agenda.

CHARLOTTE KERTING: *PROGRAM OFFICER, CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM FOR PEACEBUILDING AND STATEBUILDING (CSPPS)*

Ms. Kerting gave an overview of the process of how the Rome Declaration was initially formed, and then later reviewed and updated following a comprehensive consultation process in response to several global crises, namely COVID-19. Some key recommendations from the conference in April were reiterated, including a focus on protecting civic space, preserving peace and security to keep multilateralism alive, strengthening data, monitoring and evaluation, enhancing multi-stakeholder partnerships, and making sure civil society is more meaningfully included in implementation efforts and partnerships.

REFLECTIONS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY

Following the previous remarks, the event heard from a few individuals working in local civil society in order to provide their perspective on the current challenges and their work around SDG16+, with an objective of grounding the Rome Declaration in “reality” at the local level.

- **Grizelda Mayo-Anda**, ELAC – Philippines
- **Natalia Echevoyemberry**, ACIJ – Argentina
- **Margaret Olabisi Mekwuye**, CSCSD – Nigeria
- **Musa Ansumana Soko**, WASHnet/YPPD – Sierra Leone

GRIZELDA MAYO-ANDA: [ELAC – PHILIPPINES](#)

Ms. Mayo-Anda focussed her remarks on the lack of implementation of laws around SDG16, noting that laws are “only as good as their implementation”. She emphasized the need for further localization of the 2030 Agenda and SDG16 in order to keep the agenda alive. To this point, she spoke to donors on the importance of financing, recalling that funds, such as the legal empowerment fund, need to be better supported further because the local efforts of civil society require a lot of individuals, time, and funds.

NATALIA ECHEGOYEMBERRY: [ACIJ – ARGENTINA](#)

Ms. Echevoyemberry emphasized the ways in which the Rome Declaration provides a path forward on how to address and implement SDG16, where the global community has identified the problems as well as the solutions and way forward. In particular, she touched on state accountability, more direct support to local civil society representatives, the challenge of combating misinformation, the importance of interlinkages between SDG16 and other SDGs (especially health and climate change), and access to justice as an essential service.

MARGARET OLABISI MEKWUYE: [CSCSD – NIGERIA](#)

Speaking on the local activities in Nigeria, Ms. Olabisi Mekwuye brought to the audience's attention a recent national interactive workshop on SDG implementation. The workshop also highlighted gaps and challenges in this area, including the divergence of funding towards local insurgency groups such as Boko Haram. She stressed the need for the 2023 SDG Summit to be a “commitment summit” in order to catalyze progress on the 2030 agenda. Finally, she noted the importance of data, and raised the challenge of civil society data often not being taken seriously.

MUSA ANSUMANA SOKO: [WASHNET/YPPD – SIERRA LEONE](#)

Mr. Ansumana Soko began by stressing that the Rome Declaration resonates with local grassroots organization's realities on the ground. The Declaration has offered an opportunity at the local level to leverage a people-centered approach to development, which has been critical in his national context. He touched on the need for more meaningful civil society inclusion and participation within the SDG space, including more robust multilateral partnerships between civil society and governments. Finally, he highlighted the specific importance of increasing the capacity of the global south to implement the 2030 Agenda.

CONCLUSION

To close the event, the moderator Mr. Romano reiterated the importance of 2023 as a key mobilizing moment; it is an important opportunity to come with the following messages:

Urgency

The dire need for action is beyond us- we need action now. Civil society is doing our part on achieving SDG16: governments must step up.

Accountability

Moving forward, the focus of civil society may need to increasingly shift towards holding governments accountable for the implementation of the SDGs

Endorsement

Endorsement of the Rome Civil Society Declaration is critical to provide a strong, collective voice. Endorse the declaration if you haven't already, and spread it far and wide across civil society.

"Because of the leadership of civil society and the work we all do from the grassroots to the global, we have reason to remain hopeful. We need to hold governments accountable because we are clearly doing our part as civil society- it's time for governments to step up and do the same."

