



NGO MAJOR GROUP STATEMENT AT THE 2021 HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

“Vision and priorities of civil society, the private sector and other major groups and stakeholders: realizing the SDGs during the COVID-19 recovery”

Friday 9th July 2021, 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM EDT

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Thank you to Madam moderator, Ambassador Sandoval, UN DESA, distinguished delegates and colleagues.

My name is Oli Henman and I am glad to offer a few words on behalf of the NGO Major Group, I would like to reinforce the observations of my colleagues who have already spoken and to add some recommendations.

The process of engagement of civil society relies on trust and ensuring the voices of all parts of society can truly be heard, this must start from the local and community level in order to ensure that the insights and wisdom of those who are most directly affected by growing inequalities and climate change can be heard. Many volunteers and community organisations have played a key role in responding to the pandemic.

The UN processes may often seem distant from the lived experience of many people, so it is essential that processes are open and inclusive, to build joint ownership. As mentioned by USG Liu, the Voluntary National Reviews can play a central role to enable civil society voices to be heard, however from our own experience, we know that the process of the VNRs are still highly variable.

We appreciate that many governments do state that they wish to leave no one behind but their actions still limit the possibility for meaningful engagement and in some cases actively push people behind. In a number of cases governments are directly closing down the right to association and assembly and implementing legislation which slashes environmental protections and crushes fundamental rights to land and livelihoods.

So what can be done?

In order to build trust and ensure more meaningful participation here are 3 suggestions:

- In terms of the VNRs, we call once more for the formal inclusion of independent parallel reports and the guaranteed rights to include the inputs and evidence of civil society into the official reviews
- Secondly it is essential to strengthen participation by bridging the digital divide, putting in place infrastructure to gather much broader inputs online to ensure broad inclusion
- Finally on civic space, one clear step must be to ensure more regular reviews of Goal 16 and to link the SDG review process with the Human Rights review processes so that we ensure a truly rights-based approach to the 2030 Agenda

Look forward to continuing this dialogue over coming days, thank you!

