

21 March 2019

INTERVENTION

Opening session of UNECE's Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

Thank you chair, ladies and gentlemen, respected ministers and colleagues,

At first, allow me to introduce myself, my name is Andrea and I'm a 20 year old youth coordinator at "Hidden hero in each kid", i work with Roma and street children in the Balkan region. I have been asked to share the main messages from the civil society pre-meeting, organised by the UN ECE Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism.

Let me start with SDG4. Globally over 265 million children are currently out of school. Although I come from a country where the elementary and high school education is obligatory, still, 2/3 of the youth cannot differentiate specific letters of our Cyrillic alphabet. This is information from the World bank. Roma and street children are the most at risk. The goal underlines the importance of lifelong learning. Older people, lack adult education opportunities, leading to discrimination in the labour market and other exclusions. We all have a right to quality education, no matter our age, skin colour, religious belief, economic status, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity.

We call on all UNECE member states to significantly increase the budgets allocated to education, starting with preschool daycare to lifelong learning. And of course we need to include in the curricula education on sustainable development, climate change, gender equality, human rights and comprehensive sexuality education. This is the most effective strategy to achieve the SDGs.

The CSO Forum also came with key messages on SDG 8: Civic space, decent work and democratic rights are being eroded. Workers are denied rights, they face intimidation, harassment. More and more women and men lack social protection, such as health coverage and pensions. 89 million people in the world experienced some form of modern slavery, including in Europe, and Russia in particular. Child labour is far from being eradicated in the region. We need you to uphold human rights of us all. We no longer believe in the false solution of investing in GDP growth. In Europe, GDP growth goes hand in hand with a rise in the number

of working poor, species extinction, and air pollution deaths. Instead we need policies that spur the growth of well-being for all within planetary limits.

Also on SDG10, inequalities in our region are increasing. The world's 26 richest individuals own as much as the poorest 3,6 billion people. Almost all of these extreme rich individuals are from our region. Capital flight and illicit financial flows continue. This forum should give a strong call to close the tax paradises in our region, and to work for tax justice. SDG 10 is also about equality inside our countries. Many people experience discrimination and exclusion, such as based on age, gender, disability, LGBTI, ethnic groups, migrants, etc. SDG 10 therefore is the litmus test of the SDGs success: will they really benefit all people in all their diversity without any form of discrimination and leave no one behind?

On SDG 13: Climate issue is a matter of justice. In Mozambique a thousand people are feared dead, caused partly by our emissions. In our region, we have the biggest climate emitters, and also severe energy poverty. We need to ensure equitable access to sustainable energy, especially for vulnerable groups. Governments must prioritize investment in small-scale renewable energy access for low and middle incomes. But instead we are dismayed that we see investments in new coal mines and nuclear plants in my region. We call on you to urgently phase-out subsidies for fossil fuels and nuclear.

On SDG 16, global military spending is increasing and counts almost 2 Trillion Euro. Trillion!!! While we cannot provide education. We urgently need you to agree on a global ban on handguns and to address damage from depleted uranium weapons. We need to develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions, to ensure inclusive participation in decision-making processes, proactive disclosure of public information as well as access to information, in line with the Aarhus Convention.

Let me end by saying that the CSO forum calls for a stronger recognition of the contribution of civil society to the Agenda2030 process. Many of the Major Groups and Stakeholders are contributing with their own data and alternative reports. So far, our reports are not put on the UN website to be shared with decision makers. We want this regional forum to call on the ECOSOC to publish our alternative reports, and for them to become part of the policy process at national level in our countries.

Let me end with a quote from Greta Thunberg, our Climate Strike leader. "We have run out of excuses and we are running out of time. We have come here to let you know that change is coming, whether you like it or not".

Thank you