

Thank you chair, dear delegates,

My name is Nelya Rakhimova, I am a coordinator of the civil society Coalition for Sustainable Development of Russia. Today, I speak for the Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism which brings together 24 diverse constituency groups and representatives from across all sub-regions.

We thank UNECE for ensuring interpretation in International Sign and captioning, making the forum more accessible for persons with disabilities in line with the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy.

Yesterday, we heard from Member States that the pandemic has set back progress on the SDGs and in one case, **again today** we heard that the targets may not be reached by 2030. We also heard from the Deputy Secretary General that we need ambition, urgency and scale. In our view, for a transformative recovery, the pandemic must not be an excuse for not reaching the SDG targets, and the 2030 Agenda should guide all national and regional recovery plans.

We would also like to emphasize and agree that vaccines are a public good, and must be universally available in all countries and given to people of all ages and social groups without discrimination.

Civil society is very committed at country level to the 2030 Agenda and the VNRs. The principle of inclusion is at the heart of SDGs, we do have a stake in the Agenda and want our voices to be heard.

In this spirit of inclusivity, we recommend:

- From the start Member States need to put in place an inclusive process for civil society in VNR preparation. This process should provide information and timelines about the review, inviting opinion on policy and progress through meetings and papers, having dialogues, discussions in Parliament, and publishing in an open and transparent way the results of those dialogues. In a number of countries such good practices are applied, let's learn from them!
- We were pleased to hear about Sweden's localisation of the VNR process and encourage Member States to nationalise this initiative as a tool for Building Forward Together.
- For many countries of our region civil society has developed shadow reports on SDG implementation. For example, in Russia in 2020 we engaged over

160 organizations and 200 community leaders from the whole country and provided recommendations for the government on SDG implementation. We see such reports as a great resource of expertise and practical knowledge. We would like them to be an official part of the HLPF, made publicly available on government and UN websites. These shadow reports can be found on civil society websites such as Action for Sustainable Development and Women2030.

- UN and Member States agree on the importance of good data. It is not acceptable that data provided by private companies be given more priority than official and civil society data. We, therefore, call for civil society data, indicators, analysis and recommendations to be integrated into the official VNR reports and in the national implementation process. Finland provides a clear best practice of this and we encourage all states to follow this example.
- In terms of the VNR presentations, we would like governments to demonstrate commitment and accountability for the 2030 Agenda. Governments should also share challenges and demonstrate their willingness to reflect on improvements through dialogues with civil society. We ask for more time spent on VNR reporting during the Regional Forum and HLPF and a vibrant dialogue with civil society.
- Some Member States already include civil society in their official HLPF delegations to report on SDG progress. We would like to see all governments of the region do this, including with financial support for diverse groups of civil society.
- Civil society engagement should be an ongoing process, not just a one-off engagement in preparing for a VNR presentation. We were pleased to hear support for civil society inclusion at the Regional Forum and request that RCEM be financially supported by Member States through the UNECE secretariat.
- We recommend that RCEM is brought more centrally into the preparation of future Regional Forums. The RCEM was not involved in the planning of the Forum and its roundtables this year and, therefore, did not have the meaningful participation we would ideally like.
- We support the suggestion for an annual review of SDG 16 along with SDG 17. Building just and sustainable institutions based on an intersectional human rights approach is essential to end inequalities and build forward together in the wake of COVID-19.

- Finally, as a Russian citizen, I would like to emphasize the importance of ensuring openness to civil society in the negotiation process, and that there should be no closing of doors to us through, for example, applying the 'non objection basis' approach proposed by some governments including the Russian Federation. This is not the inclusive spirit of the SDGs and we call on all governments to reject such proposals.

Thank you chair.