



Joint Statement on behalf of the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies at the High-level Political Forum, July 2024

Presented by H.E. Mr. Ossian Smyth, Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications of the Government of the Republic of Ireland on July 15, 2024, during the general debate of the ministerial segment of the 2024 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and the High-level Segment of ECOSOC ([Watch Video](#)). This statement was facilitated by the Permanent Missions of Ireland and Indonesia to the United Nations.

This year's High-level Political Forum, with SDG 16 under in-depth review, marks a critical moment to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, with peace, justice and inclusion at their center. Conflict and violence fill the lives of far too many across the globe; equal access to justice for all remains elusive; and inequalities between and within countries continue to rise. According to the 2023 Global Progress on SDG16 report, as well as others, many countries around the world are backsliding on their human rights obligations, while global crises and challenges, including climate change, the rising cost of living, rapid technological change, and food and energy insecurity highlight our **shared yet unequal global fragility**. Following the 2023 SDG Summit, and in anticipation of the Summit of the Future, this HLPF is a critical opportunity to review implementation to recalibrate efforts towards achieving SDG 16.

Violence costs the world more than a trillion dollars a year, with the majority of this violence taking place outside of conflict zones. Meaningful access to justice, which is essential to stability and development, is lacking for two-thirds of the world's population. Seventy-one percent of the global population lives in areas of rising inequality.

When people feel unsafe, it hinders their ability to work, attend school, and get healthcare or basic services. Injustice increases the risk of violence and conflict; it also limits peoples' ability to access rights and resources.

These situations not only hamper progress towards SDG 16, but all SDGs. While backsliding on all other SDGs can impact SDG 16. Poverty and food insecurity, for example, contribute to increased inequalities and social exclusion, and negatively impact



progress towards peace. And the adverse impacts of climate change are increasing uncertainty in people's lives.

Yet, although they are pervasive, violence, injustice, and inequality are not inevitable.

Some cities have successfully lowered violence rates by over 60 percent through rights-based, holistic approaches. It is estimated that investment in justice generates significant benefits in reduced conflict risk, with rule of law and access to justice correlating to higher economic growth, greater peace, more education, and improved health outcomes. Addressing inequality and exclusion not only benefit people in vulnerable situations—more equal societies have better-sustained growth rates and stronger performance on health and education overall. Gender equality is strongly associated with more stable and peaceful societies – when women meaningfully participate in peace agreements, they are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years.

Further, democratic governance and political inclusion enhance the poverty-reduction impact of GDP growth, with increased participation and accountability having positive effects on social protection. Conversely, corruption imperils basic freedoms, undermines the legitimacy of a state, and depletes state resources for basic services and programs needed for inclusive growth and security.

In short, peaceful, just and inclusive societies provide stability and an enabling environment for development. There can be no development without peace and no peace without development.

SDG 16, with its focus on peace, justice, inclusion and institutions, is a tool and enabler for all SDGs. It is critical to mitigating the impact of current crises, while acting to prevent future ones, including through anticipatory action and a systems approach grounded in human rights. While conflicts persist, we must continue to insist on respect for and compliance with international humanitarian law.

We must therefore deliver on the political will and commitments outlined in the SDG Summit Political Declaration, and the forthcoming Pact for the Future, to harness the enabling role of SDG 16 and to turbocharge all SDGs.

And we must be inclusive, involving all stakeholders and especially civil society, if we want to bring this from global to local. Cross-regional coalitions like the Pathfinders and the Justice Action Coalition are examples of inclusive and effective multilateralism.



The 2030 Agenda represents our collective vision for a better world. As we reaffirm our commitment to it in New York, we must also ensure that we are effectively communicating its value in improving lives to people at home, with SDG 16 at its core. And we must demonstrate that we are listening. Amidst growing global polarization and distrust, we need to rebuild the social contract between people and the national and international institutions mandated to serve them. Failing on our promise to “leave no one behind” cannot be an option.

