

European Development Days – Opening Ceremony – June 2016

CONCORD Europe Speaker: Ms Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Chair of ActionAid International

Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting us as civil society to be part of the opening ceremony of the European Development Days 2016, with its focus on the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. I bring our voices as the world's citizens and as civil society in our diversities.

What would the world look like without civil society? Civil society organizations play an essential role in achieving development. We are advocates for justice, equality, people's rights, and the planet. We give people a stronger voice, challenging power imbalances and its abuse. We act as a watchdog, a critical voice and help keep governments, policymakers and the private sector accountable. Active citizenship; healthy debate and dissent are essential for effective development. We strive for addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality.

A robust and enabling environment for civil society is therefore critical to the achievement of the Global Goals. We are deeply concerned about the shrinking civil society space. In many countries we're seeing civil society organisations being attacked through highly restrictive laws and significant limitations on funding. Those challenging injustice, exposing corruption, exploitation, environmental damage and the violation of people's rights are particularly targeted. In many countries human rights defenders and social justice actors work under fear or threat. We want to work with governments to ensure vibrant civil society, fearlessly participating and contributing to the development and well-being of our communities locally, nationally, regionally and globally. Civil society needs to be meaningfully supported and resourced.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a historic opportunity to improve the well-being of people and planet. The EU has always been a leader in promoting this ambitious agenda for development. *I take the opportunity to recognize the role played by Ireland and Kenya during the negotiations.* However, nine months since the adoption of the SDGs, we fail to see any meaningful action on making this a truly universal, participatory and transformative agenda. Now is the time to walk the talk. That means being prepared to do things differently, for we cannot make change happen by simply scaling up the status quo. Therefore EU policies – on trade, investment, tax, sustainable consumption and production, migration among others - must advance the SDGs inside and outside Europe.

For example, **on migration**, the announcements made by the European Commission last week refer to the possibility to reward countries cooperating effectively to curb migration to Europe, while ensuring there are consequences on trade and development cooperation for those who refuse. External policy tools are increasingly used to keep migrants out of Europe at any cost without consideration of their human rights. Such a conditionality in policy undermines the essence of universal protection of human rights and is punitive in nature.

Currently, the key focus of the EU is promoting economic growth, at any cost, *it would seem*. We see that in all policies. This contradicts the *'leave no one behind'* philosophy that underpins the SDGs. People and planet are suffer as a result. We need a reality check on growth as the central indicator for prosperity. The evidence is there to show that simple growth approach has not worked before; as the benefits of such growth *do not* reach everyone and, worse still, they benefit mostly those who are already well off. Involvement of interest groups in the SDGs, such as the corporate or private sector, must always respect human and labour rights. It will be good, actually excellent, if such corporations pay their fair share of taxes. For effective and impactful engagement in the SDGs implementation, we really need inclusive, transparent and accountable structures in both the public and private sectors.

Achieving gender equality and women's rights is imperative to realising all the SDGs. The evidence is clear: whether it is the gender pay gap, women's land rights, high levels of HIV among adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa, human trafficking or child, early and forced marriage ~ it is about the intersectionality of inequalities, poverty, patriarchal social norms and failing policies. Therefore, resourcing women's rights requires doors of opportunities and funding; doors which enables women to enter and sit as equals at decision making tables with others ~ instead of the current little windows we have and trickle down approaches. We call for a strong recognition of the role of women's rights organizations and community, indigenous, disability, youth and faith networks among others. It's those kinds of organisations that hold many answers and alternatives to help address the global challenges we're facing.

As we begin these two days of inspiring discussions about the five 'P's of the Global Goals – People, Planet, Peace, Prosperity, Partnership - let's be honest. Achieving the SDGs is about another "P" – POWER.

- Power structures and interests,
- Power of technology and communications
- Power of decision making,
- Power to prioritize and allocate resources.
- Power to monitor and to account.

We must open up power structures so that people can participate and contribute meaningfully. We, as civil society, we bring people power; the power of women, men and young people in all our diversities for the achievement of the SDGs. We will remain on our feet with you all, until 2030. I THANK YOU.

Contact: Sabine Terlecki, head of Policy and Advocacy,

sabine.terlecki@concordeurope.org



CONCORD

European NGO confederation for relief and development

