

Laura Chinchilla Miranda
Former President of Costa Rica and Vice president of the Club de Madrid
High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
Review of SDG 16 implementation: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
New York, 12 July 2019

Dear friends,

It is a pleasure to be here today in the company of participants of different ages, nationalities and professional backgrounds. I want to recognise especially the participation of Charles and Ahona and thank them for their messages on ending violence against children. Your voices are being heard and they will not be forgotten in our discussions today. The diversity represented in this room is a reminder that in the quest for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, every citizen of the world counts. It is also a clear expression of the principle of ‘leaving no one behind’, which is at the core of the SDG 2030 Agenda. That principle is not just an aspiration but also a public policy goal. It is the star that should guide us all in this ambitious dream of the international community to build more prosperous, sustainable and just societies.

I am participating at this meeting as both the former President of Costa Rica, a country that has achieved high levels of sustainable development and institutional consolidation, and as Vice president of the Club de Madrid, a network of over 100 former heads of state and heads of government, from every continent, who came into office through a democratic process.

Before telling you more about Costa Rica’s quest for sustainable development, I want to share with you how the Club de Madrid is advancing the SDG 2030 Agenda. At the core of our work lies the Shared Societies Project, an initiative that combines commitments and policy proposals to enhance social cohesion at the government and community level. There is, therefore, a very close connection between our initiative and SDG 16: *‘Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels’*.

In our working groups at the Club de Madrid, we have identified key principles for a shared societies approach to sustainable development that I would like to share with you today, in order to inform our discussion. These are: participation of all sectors of society, with a clear emphasis on listening to their issues and concerns rather than only seeking support for preconceived solutions; transparency and full access to information for all stakeholders involved; use of affirmative action to benefit groups that are marginalized, whether on grounds of physical location, identity, gender or for other reasons; development of a long term perspective for the ecological, social and economic consequences of policies and programs; and use of disaggregated data to identify rapidly which groups are being left behind and introduce corrections. In that respect, both our Shared Societies Project and SDG 16 pursue the same sustainable development goal: to build coexistence.

Rightly so, the 2030 Agenda has identified SDG 16 as a goal that is both an outcome and enabler of sustainable development. I also believe that SDG 16 is the moral backbone of the 2030 Agenda since it recognizes and advances the equal standing of every person in shaping the society they want to share with others. Firstly, because it insists in the recognition of the dignity of every human being and their rights; and secondly, because only through effective, accountable and inclusive institutions would it be possible to protect that dignity, as well as the integrity of all persons, especially the most vulnerable ones.

Building coexistence is a complex task that ranges from procuring people's legal identity to reducing violence, guaranteeing political participation, combating discrimination, promoting the rule of law, fighting corruption, and securing fundamental human rights and freedoms, among other issues.

Unfortunately, the current numbers tell us that the international community is falling behind its SDG commitments on these issues. Only 46% of children under 5 had their births registered in sub-Saharan Africa; the global rate of intentional homicides increased from 2015 to 2017; nearly 8 in 10 children aged 1 to 14 years suffered psychological and/or physical aggression; human trafficking has increased, especially of women for sexual exploitation; the number of unsentenced detainees remains the same; limitations to appeal for denying public information remain in 40 countries; 431 human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists were killed from 2017 to 2018; and by 2018, only 39% of all countries had in place a National Human Rights Institution. These numbers, and others not listed here, should alarm us. Although the majority of SDG 16 targets appear unlikely to be met by 2030, this is in no way a call for hopelessness, but instead for a doubling of our efforts to continue moving closer towards the proposed targets.

Improving coexistence is a permanent task; moreover, since SDG 16 is an enabler for other goals, the work must not stop. Excellent recommendations for action have already been proposed by experts and they must be put into place as soon as possible. I would like to highlight some of them, which are also aligned to those previously mentioned as part of the Club de Madrid's work.

Firstly, bringing more children, youth and women into the processes of law and policy-making. Their vulnerability does not only result from the lack of laws or policies addressing their issues but also – and if not mainly – from the lack of their participation in those processes. Addressing this issue would help to reduce violence, to ensure inclusive participation and to promote non-discriminatory laws and policies.

Secondly, protecting with urgency civil activists, including but not limited to human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists. If our states continue failing to protect civil activists, they are not only failing their basic duty to protect the integrity of their citizens, but we are also losing the greatest community allies in the process of achieving the SDG 2030 Agenda. These

killings must stop now, and I urged everyone involved in implementing SDG 16 to come up with renewed and sound efforts to address this disheartening failure.

Thirdly, I suggest putting technology at the center of the initiatives to enhance institutional capacity, at both the central and local levels of government. Technology is the most powerful tool if we want to build accountable, effective and inclusive institutions. In that sense, e-government is the most direct path towards fighting corruption and enhancing institutional legitimacy and transparency.

These three overarching recommendations: enhancing children, youth, and women's participation in processes of law and policy-making; halting the killing of civil activists; and putting technology and e-government at the centre of institutional building projects will, in the end, strengthen the rule of law, a long-term and combined target of SDG 16 directed to recognise human dignity and protect everyone's integrity. The international community does not have one minute to spare to realize this monumental moral enterprise.

Dear friends,

The task ahead is one that does not distinguish between small or big countries, developing or developed. My own country, Costa Rica, has been recognized for its big achievements in sustainable development. It has on three occasions topped the Happy Planet Index and has been the only Latin American country within the first 15 nations in each World Happiness report since 2013, outdoing rich and developed nations like Germany, the United States and Singapore. Some people call this success a miracle; I prefer to call it a vision. I prefer to see these scores as outcomes from deliberate public policies and brave political decisions. On building sustainable development, and offering people `peaceful and high-quality lives, believe me, there are no accidental outcomes.

We have a clear vision, the SDG 2030 Agenda; we have the governments' commitment; and we have the experts' recommendations. Let's continue enhancing coexistence by moving forward SDG 16, and with it, many other goals of the Agenda. A more prosperous, sustainable and just world is not waiting for us somewhere to find it; we have to build it. In that quest you have the full support of myself and the Club de Madrid.

Thank you very much.