

Keynote Remarks at the Symposium on Effective Governance and Digital Transformation for Building Back Better and Accelerating the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda

16 November 2021, Incheon, Korea

Thank you for your warm introduction.

Mr. JEON Hae-cheol, Minister of the Interior and Safety of the Republic of Korea,

Mr. LIU Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs,

Mr. PARK Nam-chun, Mayor of Incheon Metropolitan City,

Delegates, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honor and privilege to address you virtually today at this UN DESA Symposium on “Effective Governance and Digital Transformation for Building Back Better and Accelerating the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

I take this opportunity offer my congratulations on the realization of this important Symposium, which comes at a critical juncture for both the Asia-Pacific region and our collective efforts to expedite achievement on the SDGs.

My gratitude goes to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, The Ministry of the Interior and Safety of the Republic of Korea, and Incheon Metropolitan City for their hard work in support of this Symposium.

My special appreciation goes to all of the delegates, public officials, and partners from Asia, Africa, and beyond who have assembled for this timely Symposium.

Your ongoing role as SDG focal points, public administrators, and ICT and innovation experts is essential as we strive to build back better and accelerate

implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Delegates, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We find ourselves at the center of a variety of converging crises and increased uncertainty.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to upend our economies, societies, and way of life.

At the same time, our planet is on fire—both literally and figuratively with the climate crisis deepening as temperatures surge, floods rage, and wildfires burn.

COVID-19 and other global crises such as climate change have underlined our fundamental interconnectedness.

They have also made it clear that in today's world we need global solutions borne out of cooperation and

partnership to holistically address the great challenges that we face.

And such solutions must be rooted in sustainability and inclusivity; and centered on enhancing the health and resilience of people, communities, and our planet.

COVID-19 has also offered us a glimpse of the global disruptions that will arise from climate change in the near future. These include, but are not limited to, elevated public health perils, mass displacement, turmoil to supply chains, increased conflict, and protracted economic crisis.

Both pandemics and climate change are inherently global issues which require a strong multilateral response and increased international cooperation and partnership.

Under this backdrop of COVID-19, planetary crisis, and dizzying change, we have also made progress in key areas

and I am confident that we have invaluable opportunities to change the world for the better. But to do so, we must come together in greater solidarity and urgency.

Today, I will speak to you about how we can advance in this era of uncertainty.

To achieve this, we will need to better collaborate and elevate our expedited actions to achieve the SDGs, harness the power of cooperation and partnerships, and instill a driving sense of solidarity with others.

But we must all play our part in this process.

Particularly, the redoubled efforts of participants from national and local governments, international organizations, academia, schools of public administration, NGOs, and the private sector like you are essential if we are to succeed in creating a more sustainable, healthier,

resilient, inclusive, and peaceful future.

With this in mind, let me highlight the following areas that warrant our special attention.

Delegates, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now into its second year, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to alter our personal lives, communities, and world. With over 250 million global cases and 5 million tragic global deaths, this pandemic has caused immense suffering and serious challenges all around the globe.

Beyond oversized impacts on global economic growth and pronounced supply and demand side disruptions, COVID-19 has also amplified existing inequalities— in health, labor, housing, food, gender, and other key areas.

These impacts have converged to create one of the most

significant global socioeconomic crises since the great depression.

For example, the UN estimates that COVID-19 cost 225 million full-time jobs in the year 2020 alone.

The Global Network Against Food Crises says that the number of food-insecure people is now at 155 million people—a five year high—as a result of the pandemic.

And UNICEF warns that 1/3 of the world's children are unable to access remote learning during school closures.

Under this troubling backdrop of the global development landscape, it is clear that the ongoing recovery will be both extended and arduous; particularly as vaccine inequity continues to extend the pandemic for so many.

To ensure that we recover correctly, it is not enough to

build back; we must build back better as well as greener.

Indeed, our recovery from COVID-19 must simultaneously address climate action to help guide us towards a more sustainable and resilient future for all people and our planet.

With this in mind, I firmly believe that achieving the SDGs can help bring us together and simultaneously enhance global inclusivity, resilience, health, and peace.

The SDGs' vision for our shared future is to ensure that no one is left behind. In order to meet this noble aspiration; it is absolutely essential to scale-up transformation, innovation, and inclusion by all stakeholders in all regions, including here in Asia-Pacific, and particularly by public governance officials.

During my time as UN Secretary-General, I am incredibly

proud to have brought the entire world together to agree to the UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2015.

Previous global governance initiatives were conceived in a much more top-down manner. The SDGs were borne out of a more organic, inclusive, and bottom-up process; as determined and agreed upon by UN Member States.

I worked tirelessly to guide this process forward and harness the inclusive spirit of the first words of the UN Charter, “We the People,” as part of the multidimensional review and follow-up process. I also ensured that climate change was integrated into the process.

To date, the SDGs have made tangible progress on bettering maternal mortality rates, combatting poverty and hunger, and improving the quality of water and sanitation.

But progress is uneven on others, with some sectors and

geographic areas moving faster than others and COVID-19, the climate crisis, and conflict all leading to troubling reversals in SDG implementation on the ground.

In this connection, global partnerships, including the active participation of leaders like you, the eminent participants of this Symposium, are necessary if we are to deliver on our development commitments.

Indeed, we need an “all-hands-on deck” approach where everyone joins together in partnership to synergize the ownership, participation, agency, and vital involvement from all people in all sectors of all societies.

SDG implementation can also help us fight against and enhance our resilience to climate change and future disasters, as well as synergize sustainable growth.

Crucially, we also need increased political will and policy

changes on the part of governments and public officials like you to scale-up investment, innovation, and action in public health, the environment, social protection, gender equality, cities, infrastructure, and education.

And refocusing our efforts on achieving SDG 16, which calls for effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels everywhere, is absolutely critical as it is a true game-changing enabler of all of the other SDGs.

In this regard, public officials must refocus their targeted efforts in their daily work moving forwards in the five thematic spheres of this Symposium.

Namely, in the areas of effective governance and public institutions for to build back better and accelerate action on the SDGs; monitoring and review of the progress of SDG implementation via quality data; innovation in public service delivery and digital transformation;

building resilience and promoting climate action; and changing mindsets and the upskilling of civil servants.

This will all go a long way in synergizing action for, and implementation of, the SDGs to help us collectively meet the moment of today. And this is also why the efforts of The United Nations Project Office on Governance (UNPOG) are so important, both regionally and globally. As such, I take this opportunity to extend my sincere congratulations on your 15th anniversary.

Delegates, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The development landscape today is drastically different from what it was just a few short years ago.

Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the interconnected nature of humanity and our planet's existence into fine focus.

Similarly, the deepening climate crisis is elucidating the fact that inherently global issues warrant inherently global actions.

These are unprecedented times and necessitate equally unprecedented responses from the UN and its bodies, as well as public officials and national governments, key partners, and all global citizens.

We must keep moving forward to leave no one behind.

We need increased cooperation to achieve the SDGs. We need increased cooperation to adapt to and solve the climate crisis and implement the Paris Agreement. And we need increased cooperation to fight against vaccine inequity and decisively defeat COVID-19 before even more dangerous variants mutate and threaten us all.

And the public sector stands at the very forefront of

establishing the guiding solutions needed to address these challenges. As such, I respectfully call on you to reinvigorate your actions to strengthen public governance capacities to accelerate implementation of the SDGs.

Today's interrelated challenges and crises respect no borders; our actions to ensure a sustainable, healthy, resilient, and inclusive future for our next generations simply must transcend all frontiers. I congratulate you once again on the realization of this Symposium, and applaud your active efforts to this end. Thank you. /END/