

June 23, 2022

Dear H.E. Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile

Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Botswana to the United Nations

President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council

We wish to acknowledge your determined efforts to ensure the successful convening of the 2022 HLPF. We are also appreciative of your expressed concerns about necessary participation of civil society, in compliance with many General Assembly resolutions. We also recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic has required the United Nations to modify the organisation of intergovernmental meetings, and in this context, we would like to thank UN/DESA for its efforts to adjust to the new methods of work.

We are writing to express our grave concerns that the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2022 risks excluding the voices of many civil society partners and grassroots communities who have been engaging very closely with the 2030 Agenda and associated processes since its inception. We are disappointed to see that CSO participation has suffered significant setbacks in the last two years.

The pandemic not only restricted our mobility but also curbed our engagement spaces across policy and decision-making processes. When events turned virtual, many CSOs, especially from the Global South suffered due to lack of connectivity, bandwidth and capacity issues. Similarly in hybrid meetings, the lack of funding and support especially for visas has led to decreasing participation, especially for grassroots actors in these processes. Overall, we feel that the process has not been transparent or inclusive, and has a detrimental effect on meaningful civil society engagement against the spirit of the enshrined principles in the 2030 Agenda.

In 2022, as events at the UN have begun to return to in-person formats, there has been a frustrating lack of clarity and limited transparency surrounding engagement modalities. Some events, such as CSW65 and the FfD Forum allowed stakeholders onto the UN premises at the last minute, however many CSOs present at the UN found themselves unable to access the relevant meeting rooms despite having taken pains to travel long distances to attend in New York. We request you to take note that CSO and stakeholder participation at ECOSOC forums has suffered at each step during the pandemic and beyond.

#### *Our participation at the upcoming High-Level Political Forum*

We are deeply concerned with the preparations for the upcoming High-Level Political Forum. The late announcement that official participation should be fully in-person has put many of us in a very difficult position regarding our logistical preparations such as provision of visas, vaccines and access to funding for expensive travel costs. The registration process opened very late, while decisions on funding for CSO speakers still remain unclear. Many of our colleagues from the Global South are facing major delays in securing visa appointments and it is highly unlikely that their travel can be arranged and adequately financed at such short notice.

The visa challenges have a particular impact on the participation of local and grassroots organisations. Consequently, a large number of CSOs from the Global South, their constituencies and their concerns are being left behind. We understand this is a violation of the principles of participation laid down not only in the HLPF Resolution but also the UN Charter and the promise of the 2030 Agenda.

While many other UN Meetings have successfully been held in a hybrid format, where CSOs and member states participation on site has been complemented by allowing some speakers to participate virtually, we would like to understand why it would not be possible to allow for hybrid participation at the HLPF. The hybrid model itself is far from a genuine modality of multilateralism given the digital divide and different forms of inequities that are mostly felt by civil societies in developing and least developing countries. Yet, it can at least signal a minimum level of effort to engage those who can not make it in person due to various structural reasons, as well as give broader opportunities for participation and enhance the breadth of community voices to be included.

We welcome the move to re-establish in person meetings but we would also recommend that it is essential to ensure timely information to enable appropriate logistical support for participation and where necessary maintain the opportunity for wider participation as well, via online engagement at the HLPF in 2022, to ensure active participation of all stakeholders, particularly national speakers from VNR countries. We have already seen some best practices in terms of combining in-person and virtual modalities in other UN meetings (for example Regional Forums), which we hope can be replicated / adapted to HLPF 2022.

There are a number of challenges which limit the ability of many partners to be physically present in New York, given the current context of the continued impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges include:

- Ongoing travel restrictions in a number of countries.
- Lack of accessible vaccines in many countries, furthermore the types of vaccines vary between countries and some types of vaccines are not accepted by US Immigration authorities.<sup>1</sup>
- Delays in securing visas for entry to the USA (time is very short)
- Very high cost of travel, including higher flight and accommodation costs to New York, particularly in the summer months

Considering these very real issues that limit the equality of access to attend the HLPF we request special considerations to include:

- a) Ensure maximum participation of stakeholders and CSOs especially those from the Global South by helping to secure travel support and expeditious visa processing in collaboration with the US Missions as soon as possible;
- b) Allow stakeholders the flexibility to participate virtually by following best practices to ensure meaningful participation across UN processes, mechanisms and meetings;
- c) Ensure VNR stakeholder speakers that are chosen to speak by the national stakeholder participants can join online from their country;
- d) Identify links to UN Country Teams for logistical support to provide online connections where needed;
- e) Integrate online participation via relevant screens and audio visual inputs in NY;
- f) Allow sufficient time in future years for adequate preparation for CSOs to participate meaningfully in UN processes including the HLPF, FfD, STI etc. .

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/proof-of-vaccination.html>

Considering the need to ensure the HLPF is an example of how to "**Leave No-One Behind**" we request that you consider these proposals. We look forward to our continued collaboration and to very engaging and enriching discussions at HLPF 2022.

With best regards,

*Major Groups & Other Stakeholders*

Children and Youth Major Group

Indigenous People's Major Group

NGO Major Group

Science and Technology Major Group

Workers & Trade Unions Major Group

Business and Industry Major Group

Women's Major Group

Stakeholder Group on Ageing

Education & Academia Stakeholder Group

Civil Society FfD Group

Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities

Volunteers Stakeholder Group

LGBTI Stakeholder Group

Together2030

Stakeholder Group of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent

Sendai Group Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism

ECE RCEM- Regional Coordination Mechanism

Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism

Africa Regional Mechanism for Major Groups and other Stakeholders

We would like to seek your support for endorsement by filling out this form

<https://forms.gle/uxuYbfe41vj5RU9b7>