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INTERVENTION

Session 2 of UNECE's Regional Forum on Sustainable Development 2020

Thank you chair,

My name is Sehnaz Kiyamaz, speaking on behalf of Natasa Dokovska, from North Macedonia who were originally meant to deliver this statement. I am speaking on behalf of the Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism.

I am glad to bring you some key points from our virtual Civil Society Forum yesterday, where we had 84 participants from 29 countries of our region. It was an interactive online forum with breakout groups in Russian and English.

The participants shared good practices as well as concerns regarding VNRs being prepared in their countries, of which I will highlight a few, and I will end with 2 recommendations.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic we are going through has shown us, more clearly, that we are all connected.

For that, we need honest and real time information about the latest conditions in each of our countries, including on the SDGs, rather than holiday commercials.

It is only through solidarity, transparent and reliable information and working together, that we will be able to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

The VNRs purpose is to enhance the implementation of the SDGs through the identification of the areas that need improvements.

In some countries VNR processes are still very centralized and limited to government actors and do not engage broader civil society, remote regions and vulnerable groups.

This fails to live up to the commitment to a '(w)hole of society' approach that leaves no one behind.

It is however encouraging that in many countries civil society is engaged in the VNR process.

In many countries strong civil society platforms now exist, often with 100s of organisations, who are monitoring SDG progress.

They are working with parliamentarians and the government on their VNRs and on long-term follow-up and implementation.

In North Macedonia more than 100 CSOs are in the consultation process for the VNR being drafted at the moment.

We also have good practices from Central Asia where in Kyrgyzstan, civil society was consulted to provide input into the official VNR.

Also in Austria civil society is part of the joint drafting committee for the VNR process together with the government.

In Finland they are jointly looking at the state budget, and how to align that with the SDGs.

In Russia the Coalition of Civil Society for sustainable development was created that is actively working on their alternative report right now.

The Russian CSOs are also offering an open dialogue with the government in order to monitor progress on SDGs together and create a common plan for the Decade of Action.

In Moldova there is also strong engagement of Civil Society and they have prepared an alternative report.

In Slovenia, which is doing their 2nd VNR, the cooperation with CSOs has become very intensive since the last VNR. Crucially, the process has had lots of consultations in local communities.

When we think of a Decade of Action we need to prioritise those SDGs lagging behind, so we need an honest assessment to identify the gaps and gather wider support to address these gaps, in terms of skills and resources.

In spite of these increased consultations, not all CSO points on structural barriers are expected to be taken into the reports. Therefore, the CSOs alternative reports should be recognized at the UNECE meetings.

One key element that our review of the VNRs showed as challenging is a lack of addressing the human rights dimension.

We need to increase the interlinkages and co-action between the VNRs and the regional and global human rights monitoring mechanisms.

For example the CEDAW, the Istanbul Convention, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Human Rights Council.

We need to strengthen access to justice for all, and we see increased accountability through VNRs as a way to achieve this.

In conclusion, I will end with two recommendations;

- 1) Firstly, CSOs need increased time and opportunities to engage with the review process of the VNRs, both at the regional and global levels. This requires more resources for CSOs.
- 2) Secondly, VNR countries should have "follow up" meetings with civil society, after their VNR sessions, to ensure implementation of SDGs with full engagement of all sections of society.

I thank you very much for your attention.
