

## OPENING SPEECH

Policy Forum on Development Global Assembly

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We find ourselves in very strange and difficult times now —with the rise of protectionist governments and rhetoric; blatant xenophobia, sexism and discrimination; governments turning their concerns inward (and moving backward, in some instances) to the detriment of the world at large, and power remaining in the hands of the wealthy elite and corporations. And in communities around the world we see this manifest as environmental destruction, repression of human rights defenders, privatization of public goods, and even further decreases in access to public services. In these conditions—in these *times*—it’s sometimes hard to see even a ray of hope at the end of this tunnel.

But we’re here, together, in this forum despite these challenges. The European Commission, governments, local authorities, civil society...we’re here to put our heads together to consider ways that we can take considerable action in the face of challenges that lay ahead of us. How do we, as members of this multi-stakeholder forum deliver effective development co-operation in the context of the 2030 Agenda, which requires everyone’s contribution? How do we move from discussion and debate to bold actions and lasting, sustainable change? We can begin to answer these questions through building on the work we’ve already done *together*—to strengthen our efforts, to make them more impactful in the everyday lives of people. The big question is: How do we make this happen?

We have to strengthen our work through multi-stakeholder partnerships and make them truly inclusive. We all have unique and significant perspectives and experiences that contribute in complementary ways to this forum and the work that will ensue from it. And inclusive multi-

stakeholder partnerships are key to making the most of what we all bring to the table. Now, I can only speak personally for CSOs and say that CSOs have a unique perspective because our lived reality is where development actually happens (or not)—on the ground in the global South. And we are the ones who face our governments, asserting people’s rights and holding lawmakers and policymakers accountable. Leaving CSOs out of the discussion means getting only part of the story right and even less of the work done. This is why inclusiveness and equality—*having equal seats at the table*—are essential to making good on the aspirations of the SDGs. The success of any development agenda rests in the broadest ownership of that agenda – and civil society can do a lot to build those bridges between policy and practice – between rhetoric and reality.

Looking more closely at the European Consensus on Development we have to commend the Commission, European Parliament, and the Council on the work done so far. We are pleased to see the prominent position that development effectiveness takes in the latest draft of the Consensus as key to achieving the SDGs. At the same time though, EU institutions must take care to not let the development agenda be derailed by a broad inclusion of non-development issues and solutions that serve purposes other than development. This is why fora such as these is so important. Here we can raise concerns, hold each other accountable, and engage in open dialogue about what needs to be done, but we must be clear about *how* we can do it together.

As we move forward on our work around the SDGs, we have to remember lessons from past work. We know that implementing this agenda will take sustained efforts at national and global levels. There need to be clear paths between policy and action to ensure that whatever is agreed on in Brussels is related into action on the ground. And when things don’t go as planned

on the ground, we need to have mechanisms in place to get that information back to policymakers. Our work must embrace the cross-cutting principles of country ownership, results focus, transparency and mutual accountability. And finally, all stakeholders must be on the same footing and foster trust between each other as members of a global community.

We're here for two days to plot a path for moving forward our work together to make some real headway in achieving the SGDs. Let's dig in, work hard, to come out with some tangible things we can take home with us. Let's challenge ourselves and each other to live up to our commitments and the principles to which we aspire. Let our work on development be an act of solidarity with each other and for the most vulnerable of us so that we can all have the equality, human rights, and human dignity we're fighting for.