

**ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE PEOPLE'S ADVOCATE
LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND!
Protection, equity and empowerment for all.**

Speaking points: Brian Williams, UN Resident Coordinator

12 December 2017, Tirana International Hotel

Dear Ms. Erinda Ballanca, People's Advocate,

Honourable Ms. Hysi, Deputy Speaker

Honourable Ms. Mesi, Deputy Prime Minister

Excellencies Ambassadors,

Dear colleagues of the United Nations,

Dear representatives of civil society organisations,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an incredible honor for me to address the annual human rights conference of the People's Advocate for the second year in a row.

For me it offers a strong encouragement that the blue flag of the United Nations remains a beacon of hope for those seeking justice, and that our team of UN agencies remain a valuable source of expertise for Albania in the area of human rights.

Since I spoke last year, much has changed.

First of all, we have a new Ombudsperson – whom I congratulate and to whom I wish great success.

Last year, I spoke about Agenda 2030 – the Sustainable Development Goals – and their fundamental link to human rights.

Since then, several important steps have been taken.

Just last week, Parliament voted unanimously – across party lines – for a resolution committing themselves to support Agenda2030, by examining the resources allocated by

Government, by engaging of all its Commissions on the topic, and by monitoring progress.

And earlier in the year, in May, the Government established a high-level political body, Chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, charged to lead efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Critically, this Inter-Ministerial Committee will regularly invite to its meetings representatives from civil society, the private sector, academia and international organizations [[and the Ombudsperson]]. Agenda2030 is not a simple project to be achieved by one or two departments, but is a long-term vision of a just and sustainable society that will require partnerships across all sectors. I hope that this Committee will hold its first substantive meeting in the first weeks of the new year.

The Prime Minister's Office has also drafted a baseline report, a reference document of sorts, that lays out what data Albania already has, and what more data is needed, in order to meaningfully use Agenda2030 as an instrument for advocacy. Already we know that much more data is needed, in particular disaggregated data, disaggregated by gender, by age, by employment status and education, by mileu (urban or rural) and – especially critical for me – disaggregated by municipality. Municipalities are the democratic building block of Albania, and data needs to be made available at that level, in order for citizens to hold their leaders to account.

This draft report also reveals that much less data is available for indicators related to environmental protection, an area that requires particular attention.

In another important step, the Government has announced that it will voluntarily report on progress against the SDG's next July in New York, at the UN's High Level Political Forum, holding themselves up to global scrutiny.

Academia has also energized itself, with 25 universities signing a declaration to research, monitor, debate and make policy recommendations for achieving the SDGs.

The Minister of Finance has agreed to review the budget – in particular the Medium Term Budget Programme – to look at how resources are lining up.

In sum – at least in terms of planning for Agenda2030 – a lot has been done over the last year, and the full UN family of agencies looks forward to supporting Albania in these efforts.

But we have to ask ourselves, for the every-day people in the streets and villages of Albania, how much has happened? Are their rights better respected?

Well, there is some good news. For example, there has been a significant increase in the number of Roma children who are now attending school. The number of women – targets or potential targets of violence - who feel secure enough to come forward to the police or other services has increased fifty-fold over the last ten years. Grass roots efforts – like the LGBTI business index - to raise awareness about the humanity and rights of those who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is growing. And we at the UN are proud to stand by them, for example through our Free and Equal campaign. The number of women in parliament is the highest in Albania’s history, and close to the global target (inadequate though it is) of 30%. Legislation in the areas of gender equality, protection of children, social inclusion, social care, social housing, is constantly improving – driven also by the aspiration to join the European Union.

But so much more needs to be done.

One need only look at the floods last week, where Roma communities found themselves in particularly vulnerable locations, with inhumane housing in many municipalities that is simply unacceptable given the general means of the Albanian nation. Roma and Egyptian communities continue to feel subjected to generalized discrimination, diminishing their access to services and opportunities.

The disabled of Albania – loved as they are by their families – are not receiving the broader social support that they deserve. They need access to services, not isolated but to the extent possible mainstreamed into school and employment.

And so, to come back to the People’s Advocate, the functioning of this Paris-grade-A human rights institution is more important than ever.

It is essential that it receives consistent budget support, that the vacant Commissioner’s seats are filled, and that its relationship with Parliament is vibrant, whereby its reports and guidance are debated and taken into account.

The United Nations family is ready to do whatever we can to assist. Many of the important instruments of the United Nations – such as CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – require and benefit from the engagement of the Ombudsperson. For example, in 2017, the People’s Advocate contributed for the first time to the CEDAW process by submitting an alternative report,

and as a result more than 80% of Ombudsman's recommendations became part of the CEDAW Committee's Concluding Observations on Albania.

And similarly it is true for many of the mandates of UN organizations - whether focused on the protection of children, the prevention of trafficking, the rights of migrants and stateless people, the availability of services for youth, or many of the other tasks that our Member States have assigned to us – that partnership with independent human rights institutions is simply a must.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

At the end of the day, development is about the expansion of the realization of human rights. This is perhaps an explanation for why the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is one of the most translated documents in the world, into more than 500 languages.

This week, we begin a year long countdown to the 70th anniversary of the proclamation of the Declaration, signed on Dec 10th, 1948. Throughout the year we will be promoting our celebratory campaign, #StandupforHumanRights, and do our very best to lead by example. And I invite you to join us.

Thank you.