

Speech by UN Resident Coordinator, Brian J. Williams on UN Day 2018

29 October 2018

Thank you all for coming to celebrate this year's United Nations Day.

Much has happened over the last 12 months, and we have much to celebrate.

The **Sustainable Development Goals** – Agenda 2030 – has gained momentum globally this year, and Albania added its part.

Albania presented in July at the United Nations its own National Report on the SDGs, highlighting achievements it made since 2015. For example a turnaround in the management of the electricity sector; progress in urban renewal in towns across the country; critically, the initiation of the judicial reform; an increased engagement of women in political life and public administration; and a reformed public administration with a roll-out of new citizen-centric services.

At the same time, the government's SDG report also highlights challenges, particularly under the theme of 'leaving no one behind'. Roma and Egyptian as well as the disabled populations continue to suffer discrimination and see below-average access to services and opportunities. Even though the situation is improving, to 'put the last first', as we say, more resources and more public leadership are needed. This should include the engagement of Roma in the Governmental administration in visible positions of leadership.

Another population at risk of being left behind are rural people, and particularly rural women. Reducing poverty further in Albania will require more women finding themselves engaged in the formal economy: owning property, taking out loans, building new skills, or starting businesses.

While the Government issued this report on previous year's efforts, from the UN side we also added to SDG momentum through the organization of a multi-UN-agency policy analysis undertaken during the 2nd quarter, in collaboration the Government, the World Bank and the European Union.

This policy analysis – launched formally last month – identified three clusters of work that, with more investment, could accelerate sustainable development results: first, more investment in governance and rule of law; second, investment in an inclusive, green economy; third, investment in human capital. We will be actively seeking to mobilize more resources – from Government and partners - so that we can follow-up on these recommendations, for example by investing more in rural employment of women or by making investment in agro-tourism more inclusive of Roma populations; for example, by providing institution-building support to the People's Advocate; or for example by investing more in the primary health care model.

Of course, when we talk about 'accelerators', we know that the **EU accession** process itself is probably the greatest accelerator of all. The EU, the Government and the UN are working arm-in-arm to ensure that pursuit of SDGs and EU accession are mutually reinforcing.

Partners and friends,

I would like to say a word about **human rights**. Earlier this month I was in New York at a global meeting with the Secretary-General, and he underlined that human rights are woven into the very fabric of all of the SDGs. That not only is there an SDG16 – for justice and accountable institutions – which has direct impact on human rights, but that Agenda 2030 in its entirety simply will not be achieved successfully without broadened and consistent respect for human rights.

This is particularly important to highlight this year – being the **70th anniversary of the Declaration** of Human Rights. The Universal Declaration and the moral principles that it articulates has been cited as being one of the fastest spreading sets of values that human history has ever seen. After 70 short years, we see relentless and growing civil advocacy for human rights achievement in every corner of the globe.

In **Albania, there has been much human rights progress**, and it should be proud, for example, of its Paris-qualified grade-A independent human rights organization, the People's Advocate; of the deep judicial reform process it has started and in which the population has so much hope; and of increased efforts of Parliament to engage with – and respond to the recommendations of -- independent institutions such as the Commissioner against Discrimination, the Commissioner on the Protection of Data, INSTAT and the People's Advocate. Or in education, where the deployment of 700 more assistant teachers is resulting in more inclusive education, allowing for quality integration of disabled and special-needs kids.

It is worth reminding everyone that next year Albania will be undergoing its regular 4-year **Universal Periodic Review** on human rights. It provides the occasion to assess Albania's policies and practice on human rights, including efforts to protect the most at-risk, including asylum seekers and migrants, or those of the LGBTQI community. This will be an important process for all stakeholders to engage in.

Now let me turn to today's theme of **youth**.

In September of this year, **Youth2030** was launched at the General Assembly in New York, a global strategy – synchronized with Agenda 2030 – that recognizes that youth need to be more **engaged now**, if they are to play the constructive role we are all counting on to manage the planet.

Being **more engaged now** of course means more investment in education and skills building generally, but also specific efforts to reach young people that are not finding productive pathways – identified by the acronym “NEET” – those neither in employment, education or training. In Albania the rate of 'NEET' is 30 percent, significantly higher than the EU average and highlighting the need for more outreach.

The UN's global **Youth2030 strategy** also means opening more ourselves as the UN – creating opportunities for youth to learn about, critique, and mold our own UN programmes. And we need to do more to create opportunities for youth to speak publicly about priorities for the future Albanian society.

We are thrilled that today you will be able to see a film about six stellar examples of active Albanian youth, as well as greet the award-winners.

And finally, I am proud to announce that the **United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, through the UN family in Albania, will be entering into a partnership with the Regional Youth Cooperation Office** with \$2.1m of assistance. The UN – notably UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA – will use our offices across the Western Balkans to expand the reach and capacities of RYCO and their partners. But I will let Djuro say more about it.

Partners and friends,

Speaking on behalf of the United Nations family in Albania – we are tremendously privileged to be working with so many wonderful partners. I would like to thank all of you for the trust you place in the United Nations – which is, after all, your institution. The UN organizations in Albania – seven are resident and another nine provide support from regional offices – provide world class expertise. Leading partners in Albania include the EU, Italy, Switzerland and Sweden. New partners this year include Croatia and Norway – both with UNDP. And the Government of Albania itself was the fifth biggest contributor to UN programmes in Albania in 2017. This is entirely appropriate as an upper middle-income country – but deserves to be noted and appreciated by all development partners.

Next year – on January 1st – the United Nations will put into action a significant reform of the UN Development System. Led by the UN Secretary-General and mandated unanimously by UN Member States in July, Albania is an excellent position – given its proud history as a 'Delivering as One' pilot country – to deliver technical assistance in an even more unified, transparent and effective manner.

And very finally, allow me to acknowledge and appreciate the tremendous effort of all the staff of the UN in Albania – each and every one of them a committed leader on Agenda2030 and Albania's Sustainable Development. Thank you to all of them as well as to their working level counterparts in Ministries, civil society organizations and development partner institutions. Together, we are making a difference.

Thank you.