

Regional Sustainable Development Forum for the UNECE Region

Thursday 7 April 2021

Plenary Session and Closing: Forward-looking policies for a sustainable COVID-19 recovery

I am Erinda Ballanca, People's Advocate of the Republic of Albania. Today, I also represent ENNHRI, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions which brings together 47 national human rights institutions across the Council of Europe States.

NHRIs that comply with the UN Paris Principles are **recognised as an indicator of peaceful, just and inclusive societies under SDG 16** and internationally **recognised as human rights defenders**. The Paris Principles require states to establish NHRIs by law, as the independent public authority with a broad mandate to promote and protect human rights for all.

In UN human rights fora, such as the UN Human Rights Council, NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles have official participation and speaking rights. We encourage all UN SDG Regional and Global processes to enhance the independent participation of national human rights institutions compliant with the Paris Principles. **An inspiration can be drawn from NHRIs' participation in the General Assembly and Human Rights Council processes.**

We, European NHRIs, have documented how Covid-19 pandemic had exposed and exacerbated **human rights gaps and inequalities** in the UNECE region. We have reviewed **policies in National Recovery and Resilience Plans**, tested them against human rights standards and **advised European governments to use the Agenda 2030** as a guidance when ensuring sustainable recovery.

When it comes to the **SDGs being reviewed at this Forum**, progress in achieving them was already slow before the pandemic.

For example, data collected by the Danish Institute for Human Rights¹ on the **Goal 4** shows that countries in UNECE region are lagging behind to **effectively integrate human rights education into national frameworks**, particularly within teacher education and student assessments. In keeping with both their international human rights obligations and commitments under SDG 4.7, states in the UNECE region must step up efforts to embed human rights in national education systems. The Covid-19 crisis has only exacerbated existing patterns of discrimination, fostered increased levels of violence, and stigmatized

¹ Data collected using the Danish Institute's [SDG 4.7/Human Rights Education tool](#).

certain population groups within our societies. This calls for a renewed emphasis on the integration of human rights education as a key component of the right to education and as a key accelerator of the 2030 Agenda.

Secondly, European states should still strive to collect **disaggregated data** based on prohibited grounds of discrimination to monitor progress and develop evidence-based responses to inequalities.² **In line with the Goal 17**, emerging partnerships between NHRIs and National Statistical Offices should be nurtured and encouraged so that international and national human rights data can fill gaps and better identify groups in need of special protection in the region.

Lastly, it goes without saying that human rights and the Agenda 2030 can be a powerful vector to **rebuild and contribute to peace**. While addressing ongoing conflicts we need to invest in conflict prevention, management and peacebuilding and promote an environment free of gross human rights violations, systemic discrimination and violence.

Strong, inclusive and accountable institutions, including NHRIs, as envisaged under Goal 16 are essential for steering sustainable recovery and ensuring just, peaceful and inclusive societies. We, European NHRIs strive to ensure that human rights are not forgotten in these uncertain times. We have acted with speed and expertise and advised states to ensure that no one is left behind, while protecting people from further discrimination during the pandemic in the recovery. Equally through community engagement, mediation, monitoring of peace agreements or contribution to transitional justice, we fed human rights expertise during conflicts or in the peacebuilding processes.

At ENNHRI, we stand ready to support European states in ensuring that the recovery is human rights-based, in line with the 2030 Agenda and our societies are just, inclusive and peaceful.

² Danish Institute for Human Rights. (2021). *Sustainable Recovery: Building on Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Lab Report.*