

United Nations General Assembly

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Statement by

H.E. Mr. Sauli Niinistö,
President of the Republic of Finland

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(check against delivery)

Mr. President,
Mr. Prime Minister,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Your Excellencies,

It is a great honour for me to address this Opening Plenary Summit that just adopted the new Sustainable Development Agenda. I would like to thank the Secretary General for his relentless work in supporting the achievement of previous goals and setting new ones. I would also like to thank President Museveni and Prime Minister Rasmussen for chairing this historical event.

For 15 years, the Millennium Development Goals have inspired us in our pursuit of development. Significant progress has been made in achieving all of the goals. Global efforts have helped to lift more than one billion people out of extreme poverty. To put this into perspective, it means 200 times the population of my own country, Finland, or 27 times that of Uganda.

More than a billion people have better possibilities today than just 15 years ago. Today, more girls can attend school than ever before. Progress has been made in the fight against hunger and inequality. This work is now continuing.

It is also important that the MDGs have kick-started progress where it has been lacking, especially in Africa where there has been unprecedented economic growth and poverty reduction.

Your Excellencies,

Such progress has not been easy or without setbacks. Not all of the goals have been achieved. While progress has been made in achieving all of the MDGs, more has been achieved in some cases than in others.

Gender inequality and violence against women are proving to be intractable challenges. Broad progress towards gender equality has wavered. This is a challenge that we must take seriously.

Investing in gender equality is a direct path towards poverty reduction, inclusive growth and prosperity. An ambitious agenda for achieving gender equality and women's rights must be matched by ambitious resources.

We simply cannot solve the world's problems while keeping half of the population out of leadership positions and subordinated to the other half. To achieve this goal, we need to change the way in which we act and think.

Another critical factor, besides gender equality, that we cannot overlook or overcome is environmental sustainability. Addressing climate change and health, food and water provision requires coordinated global monitoring and the modelling of several factors — social, economic and environmental. This also requires an ambitious climate deal in Paris in 2015. Decisions made in Paris will be the world's best, last chance of reaching an agreement on cutting carbon emissions.

The changing climate is affecting the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people. What we have seen in Europe during this autumn is only a sad prelude to what will happen in the future, if we fail to achieve environmental sustainability.

Your Excellencies,

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a global deal in which each and every one of us is a participant and thereby responsible for ensuring its success. There is no room for disputes or failure – succeed we must. The alternative is simply too expensive, with too much human suffering and misery on the way.

We can choose whether our legacy is one of hope or despair. It is still up to us to decide.

Thank you!