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High-level segment

Summary record of the 29th meeting

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President: Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines)

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The meeting was called to order at 9.10 a.m.

Agenda item 5: High-level segment (E/2019/65, E/2019/66, E/2019/68, E/2019/70 and E/2019/78)

Opening of the segment

1. **The President** declared open the high-level segment of the 2019 session of the Economic and Social Council, including the three-day ministerial meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Council.

Statement by the President

2. **The President** said that since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, through its thematic reviews, the high-level political forum had helped mobilize Governments around the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, encouraging the tracking of progress based on data. The forum had also kept Member States focused on the principles of leaving no one behind and had heard 142 States present a voluntary national review of their implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Noting the participation of youth in the high-level segment, she stressed that their generation was owed the future they wanted. More needed to be done, more quickly and in a transformative way.

3. She had established the Group of Friends of the Voluntary National Reviews to help Member States forge new partnerships and better understand ways to improve their actions. The Group's conclusions would reverberate in the Sustainable Development Goals Summit to be held in September 2019. She commended the delegations of the Bahamas and Sweden for leading discussion on an action-oriented consensual political declaration to be adopted at the Summit. The input of delegations on ways to make the high-level political forum more action-oriented would be recorded in preparation for the review of its format during the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly. She hoped that the discussions during the forum would encourage Heads of State and Government to return in September ready to announce ambitious acceleration actions.

Statement by the Secretary-General

4. **The Secretary-General** said that, over the past four years, the high-level political forum had kept the spotlight firmly on the Sustainable Development Goals. In the coming days, Member States would provide details on the collective effort to advance the 2030 Agenda, including through the presentation of voluntary

national reviews by nearly 50 States. Member States would also be focusing on the power of actions to support empowerment, equality and inclusion. In view of the upcoming critical summits in September 2019, he wished to draw attention to the notion of the "inclusion imperative". There was clear evidence that development was not sustainable if it was not fair and inclusive, and that rising inequality hindered long-term growth. Alongside the impacts of globalization and rapid technological change, inequality raised economic anxiety, eroded public trust and undermined social cohesion, human rights, peace and prosperity. At the same time, there was mounting evidence of the transformative results of fostering equality and inclusion, particularly of women, such as higher gross domestic product, greater stability, and enhanced private sector performance and institutional effectiveness.

5. For all of those reasons, the goals of inclusion, empowerment, equality and leaving no one behind were at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. Yet, four years after its adoption, the global picture was unsettling. While there had been encouraging progress made by many Governments, civil society and the business community, it was not enough, and efforts must be stepped up. Extreme poverty rates were not falling fast enough to meet the 2030 goal. Inequality between and within countries was disturbingly high, and people were rightly questioning a world where a handful of men held the same wealth as half of humanity. Global unemployment levels had dropped since 2015, yet wage growth had stagnated; 30 per cent of young women and 13 per cent of young men were not in education, employment or training; and 4 billion people worldwide lacked access to social protections. Millions of women were achieving gender parity and equal treatment within the workplace, but far more remained excluded from employment in the first place. No country in the world was on track to attain gender equality by 2030, and women continued to be hampered by discriminatory laws, unequal access to opportunities and protections, high levels of violence and damaging norms. While there had been encouraging improvements in access to quality education, health care, water and sanitation, and affordable clean energy, there was still a struggle to reach the most marginalized with those essential services, particularly groups such as adolescent girls and persons with disabilities. Fair and efficient justice systems, which were critical to inclusive development, remained beyond the reach of some 5 billion people. Civil society organizations and human rights defenders were also facing increasing levels of intimidation, disruption and violence, while migrants and refugees were suffering intolerable levels of insecurity, poor treatment and discrimination.

6. Climate change was advancing faster than human efforts to mitigate it. In that regard, three pivotal records had recently been shattered. First, greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere were at the highest levels in 3 million years. Second, the World Meteorological Organization reported that 2015–2019 would be the five warmest years on record. The recent heat waves in Europe, South Asia and elsewhere were clear evidence of that. Third, sea levels were rising at an accelerated pace. Indeed, some scientists were already predicting that sea level rise could double from what was currently projected for the end of the century. The poorest and most vulnerable people and countries would suffer the most as a result of those changes.

7. He drew attention to four key conclusions to advance the inclusion imperative. First, public and private investments in the Sustainable Development Goals must be dramatically scaled up, as they were the best prevention tool available. Countries must reverse the downward trends of official development assistance and faithfully meet their commitments under the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. Support to developing countries must be combined in order to mobilize domestic resources with global action to effectively fight illicit flows of capital, money-laundering and tax evasion. Robust financing mechanisms were needed for global health. Massive investments would be needed in quality education, rooted not only in learning but also in learning how to learn and learning across the span of a lifetime. That must be coupled with a new generation of social protection initiatives in the context of the fourth industrial revolution and the progress of artificial intelligence. Conditions must be created for private sector development and long-term market investments that generated sustainable economic growth, decent work and prosperity in rural areas.

8. Second, global climate action must be advanced in a manner that reduced inequality. Shifting to a greener economy could create 24 million jobs globally by 2030 while safeguarding the 1.2 billion jobs that depended on a stable and healthy environment. People needed help acquiring the twenty-first century skills required for the global transition from fossil fuels to low-carbon, climate-resilient infrastructure. Member States would need to fully replenish the Green Climate Fund and meet their commitment to mobilize \$100 billion per year from public and private sources for climate mitigation and adaptation in developing countries by 2020.

9. Third, implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration must be stepped up. Beyond the critical issue of securing borders,

migration policies concerned some of the world's most vulnerable people, all of whom had rights. Their vast contribution to sustainable development, in both countries of origin and destination, was absolutely critical. Fourth, leaving no one behind and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals were inherently linked to human rights, diplomacy and prevention. Fragile and conflict-affected States, for example, were projected to be home to about 85 per cent of those who would remain in extreme poverty in 2030. A strengthened global commitment was needed to end conflicts and displacement and tackle root causes. Everyone needed to stand together for justice, tolerance, gender equality and human rights.

10. World leaders would gather in September 2019 for a series of critical meetings: the Climate Action Summit, the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, a high-level meeting on universal health coverage and a high-level dialogue on financing for development. There would also be a review of the commitments to support small island developing States and the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway. He called on leaders to come to those meetings not with beautiful speeches, but with concrete actions, plans and commitments to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The people of the world did not want empty promises. They were demanding transformative change that was fair and sustainable. The world gathering in September should be used to ratchet up ambition, highlight the imperative of inclusion and kickstart a decade of delivery and action for people and planet.

Statement by the President of the General Assembly

11. **Ms. Espinosa Garcés** (Ecuador), President of the General Assembly, said that the 2030 Agenda had confirmed the credibility of the multilateral system and bore the hopes of the 7.7 billion people on the planet. While there had been some advances since its inception, such as a reduction in extreme poverty and infant mortality, much more must be done if the objective of leaving no one behind was to be achieved. The global Multidimensional Poverty Index of the United Nations Development Programme indicated that there was poverty and inequality in every region of the world, with 1.3 billion people experiencing deprivation in multiple ways. Policy development must therefore take into account the complexity and many dimensions of poverty. There were 11 years left to prevent the potentially devastating impact of climate change on life on the planet. The report of the Secretary-General entitled “Special edition; progress towards the

Sustainable Development Goals” (E/2019/68), the special report entitled *Global Warming of 1.5°C* of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the 2018 Emissions Gap Report of the United Nations Environment Programme all emphasized the urgent need to accelerate and increase the impact of actions to address climate change.

12. During her presidency, she had worked with Member States to ensure that the activities of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly supported the 2030 Agenda and contributed to a successful high-level political forum and Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September 2019. Common themes had emerged during those collective efforts, including the need to prioritize actions that addressed urgent challenges as they paved the way for longer-term risks and opportunities. Smart climate action, for example, was a matter of survival for present and future generations, and also made business sense. In order to enable the societal transformations and innovative approaches required under the 2030 Agenda, its implementation must be inclusive, harnessing the contributions of all stakeholders, including indigenous peoples, technology entrepreneurs, parliamentarians, academics, youth, artists, migrants and people with disabilities. The empowerment of women and girls also offered tremendous potential in respect of sustainable development. She urged Member States to use the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to fulfil its promise of equality to half of humankind.

13. The 2030 Agenda was not a vision of utopia; it was within reach. Indeed, through the voluntary national reviews, Member States would be presenting some of the many solutions and resources available. There were trillions of dollars available and more to be made through smart actions and investments. In that regard, Governments must offer the political will and courage to tackle the structural and financial challenges that hindered an enabling environment for sustainable development, and to take the long-term decisions needed, despite the reality of short-term political cycles, in order to ensure inclusive and sustainable economies. In addition, partnerships must be dramatically scaled up; the Sustainable Development Goals required a new social contract. Lastly, Governments must commit to action and ambition, applying a razor-sharp focus to the most transformative next steps, informed by evidence-based assessments of approaches that had worked.

14. The Sustainable Development Goals Summit would be the outcome of many years of efforts at the local, national and multilateral levels and would be the best opportunity for Member States to reaffirm their

commitment to their peoples. She commended the delegations of Sweden and the Bahamas for diligently facilitating the achievement of the political declaration to be adopted during the Summit. She urged Member States to use the high-level week to show their ambition and announce accelerated measures and special steps that responded to the urgency of the challenges they faced. The five high-level meetings scheduled in September 2019 represented a key opportunity to demonstrate that multilateralism could deliver tangible benefits to peoples’ lives. It was up to Member States to show leadership and create the world of the future.

Keynote statements

15. **Ms. Robinson** (Chair of The Elders) said that the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement constituted tangible proof of the benefits of multilateralism and a rebuke to the narrow agendas of nationalism, isolationism and self-interest. Their full implementation offered a pathway to a world where poverty, inequality and conflict would not blight the life chances for the millions of people denied the opportunity to enjoy their fundamental rights. The special report entitled *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, issued by IPCC in October 2018, had altered understanding of the global situation, making it clear that staying at or below 1.5°C warming above pre-industrial levels was the only safe level for the planet, and that further warming up to 2°C would cause considerable damage. That had been followed by the report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services issued in May 2019 on the loss of biodiversity and potential extinction of 1 million species. Member States could no longer afford to view the 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement as voluntary; full implementation of both frameworks had become imperative to secure a liveable world. A change of mindset was therefore required at the global political level. IPCC had called for a 45 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030, indicating that that goal was feasible with the appropriate political will. In 2018 carbon emissions had increased globally and were on course to increase further in 2019. There was a global crisis under way which must be treated as such.

16. The high-level political forum provided an opportunity to honestly assess States’ progress and pending actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals so that when world leaders convened in September 2019 for the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, they could offer more than just words. In that regard, she emphasized the call made by the President of the General Assembly for Member States to announce acceleration actions at the Summit. While all of the Goals were equally important, she wished to emphasize

Goal 13 on climate change and Goal 16 on justice for all.

17. Peace, justice and inclusion had been fundamental to her career in public life, from national politics in Ireland to her time as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to her present role as Chair of The Elders, the group of independent global leaders founded by Nelson Mandela. Humanity would not overcome the key existential challenges facing the world, from nuclear weapons to climate change, if it spurned cooperation. Nor should any nation assert itself as greater than any another and constrain itself to acting only in its self-interest. When they had committed to the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, world leaders had chosen a future where the human rights of all members of society would be valued over a future where few lived in comfort while the poor and marginalized faced climate chaos, discrimination and violence. The high-level political forum offered a crucial opportunity to strengthen that commitment and insist that strategies to achieve the Goals left no one behind.

18. The need for equal justice for all was a thread that ran through all of the Sustainable Development Goals. In discussions of climate change, reference to climate justice was critical. It was grotesquely unfair that the poorest and most vulnerable people on the planet, who had contributed the least to carbon emissions, were paying the highest price as temperatures and sea waters rose. Some small-island States in the Pacific would literally disappear unless the richer industrialized countries took much more radical and urgent action, including a definitive and wholesale move away from fossil fuel use and extraction, to keep the global temperature rise to 1.5°C. Failure to act would make any future references to justice or common endeavour ring hollow for the millions impoverished and displaced by the climate catastrophe.

19. Injustice took many other forms, including in everyday relationships between men and women and in public and private institutions. The Task Force on Justice, an initiative that was co-chaired by another member of the Elders, had launched a report that year that estimated that 5.1 billion people lacked meaningful access to justice, a chasm between rich and poor that should shame the international community. Failure to deliver justice also affected physical and mental health, the environment and the economy. The Task Force on Justice estimated that in low-income countries, everyday justice problems cost more than 2 per cent of the gross domestic product. On a global scale, violence against women was estimated to cost between 1 and 4 per cent of the gross domestic product. Change was possible for a fraction of those costs. Preliminary

calculations by the Task Force on Justice suggested that in low-income countries, it would cost as little as \$20 per person to provide access to basic justice services to all. Such investments multiplied when Governments cooperated with communities and civil society groups that truly understood the realities people faced.

20. However, money alone would not solve the problem; access to justice would only be achieved through a people-centred approach. During the upcoming voluntary national review presentations, Governments would be sharing inspiring accounts of how strengthening access to justice by instituting low-cost interventions, enacting legislation and gathering new data was helping them to achieve other Sustainable Development Goals, including those related to economic growth, gender equality and access to health and education. More attention and resources should also be devoted to addressing the root causes of conflict and injustice. Those working to deliver justice on behalf of others – judges, lawyers and prosecutors but also paralegals, advisors, community leaders and civil society groups – must be recognized and protected so that they remained essential partners. Business as usual would not deliver the results the world needed. The forum must be used as a springboard for action to demand real ambition from leaders and deliver the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals and build a world that Nelson Mandela and other justice champions would recognise as fair, open and free.

21. **Mr. Curtis** (Sustainable Development Goals Advocate and film director) said that he was speaking on behalf of everyday people, from indigenous leaders to schoolchildren, who did not know what the high-level political forum was, but did know that the Secretary-General was in the unique position of leading the United Nations, in which they invested their hopes and dreams of a better world. In respect of the Sustainable Development Goals, he had founded Project Everyone with the aim of communicating the Goals as widely as possible and thus gaining support for their achievement. People across all sectors had been eager to collaborate in the project. He urged Member States to consider and invest in the tremendous number of potential partners that could bring their varied skills and resources to implementing the 2030 Agenda. Those potential partners included churches, trade unionists, investment bankers, insurance companies, pension providers, civil society organizations, technology leaders, activists, scientists, philanthropists, feminists and academia. It was becoming increasingly clear that sustainable development could be profitable and would be the key to funding actions to achieve the Goals. Furthermore, in

the fields of business and technology, there was growing awareness that advances must be done with social purpose or they would fail. People were primed to an extraordinary and unpredictable extent to collaborate on the Goals and make the transformations needed more radical.

22. It was difficult to speak of urgency in a political context, as the word was too frequently used and had lost its power. However, one of the key purposes of the Sustainable Development Goals was to set deadlines and intensify the urgency of action. In that regard, the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Special edition: progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals” (E/2019/68) stressed that global hunger was on the rise, greenhouse gas emissions had reached an unprecedented level and at least half of humanity lacked access to essential health services. The word “urgent” should evoke the simple, intimate urgency of ordinary people, like girls forced into child marriage and families deciding whether to abandon their lives and become refugees. Member States could maintain the sense of urgency by supporting large-scale efforts, such as the International Development Association of the World Bank, which represented major investments that should not be allowed to flag. Member States could also devote special attention to every target under each Goal in order to make the deadlines real.

23. The Sustainable Development Goals represented a unique opportunity to end extreme poverty and free future generations from the threat of climate change. If the opportunity was not taken, acceptance would creep in and the 2030 Agenda would fail. The high-level political forum must therefore catalyse the General Assembly and provide the energy and information needed to make the week of planned summits in September 2019 a series of visionary and historic meetings rather than level-headed presentations of progress made. A decisive recommitment to the Goals must be made. People all over the world were standing ready to launch a campaign in 2020 to press for the acceleration of actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. It would be tragic if their enthusiasm were not met with equal dedication from Governments. He called on Member States to commit to an annual September General Assembly meeting on the Sustainable Development Goals, inspired by the high-level political forum, to enable radical progress every year leading up to 2030. The brilliance of the Sustainable Development Goals was their comprehensiveness; they linked together all of the key issues, such as consumption, employment, biodiversity and gender justice, from the local to the global level. However, that also meant that they could not be partially

met. The delegations in the room represented the generation and people in power who could and must make the Sustainable Development Goals a reality.

24. **Mr. Lee** (Chair, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)) said that climate action and sustainable development were inseparable. The latest IPCC assessment established three points of linkage between climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals. First, global warming was already producing negative impacts on natural and human systems, seriously impeding progress towards some of the Goals. Second, while an ambitious climate goal, such as limiting global warming to 1.5°C, would help achieve most of the Goals, it would also slow the achievement of the rest: balancing the pursuit of all of the Goals would be a challenge. Third, ambitious climate actions produced new opportunities for the economy, environment and society, but were contingent on international cooperation, with social justice and equity being core aspects of development actions.

25. Those three points also encapsulated the recent IPCC special report entitled *Global Warming of 1.5°C*. While the current global average temperature was 1°C higher than pre-industrial levels, the warming was not uniform across geographic areas. For example, the current Arctic temperature was two to three times higher than pre-industrial levels. Moreover, 40 per cent of the world’s population lived in areas where warming already exceeded 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for at least one season, causing notable disruptions in livelihoods, such as an increase in migration from agriculture-dependent countries. A 1°C increase in average temperature was associated with a 1.9 per cent increase in bilateral migration flows from 142 sending countries and 19 receiving countries. That trend supported the concern raised by IPCC five years earlier that climate change impacted on migration and displacement was an emerging risk.

26. IPCC had also found that coral reefs and biodiversity were at higher risk with current warming than had been previously understood, and that the Arctic, small islands, drylands and least developed countries faced disproportionately higher risks than other places. In particular, warming in the tropics and the southern Hemisphere subtropics had caused economic slowdowns and adversely affected crop yields. Current warming was also already having serious impacts on ecosystems, human health and agriculture. As a result, reaching goals to eradicate poverty and hunger, and to protect life on land had become more challenging. Member States’ evaluation of their progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals had corroborated the IPCC conclusions on the effects of

current warming, most notably the persistence of extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia; an increase in malaria; and a lack of access to sanitation services.

27. IPCC had evaluated the differences in impacts between 1.5°C and 2.0°C warming and had found that the risks to sustainable development would be considerably less at 1.5°C. Warming to 2°C and higher would make it likely that the Goals on eradicating poverty and hunger, providing clean water and protecting ecosystems could not be met. The difference between 1.5°C and 2°C would mean 50 per cent fewer people exposed to water shortages; 10 million fewer people exposed to the risk of sea level rise; a one-third reduction in the risk of decline in crop yields; and reduced risks to biodiversity, health, livelihoods, food security, human security and economic growth.

28. Limiting warming to 1.5°C required the world to become carbon neutral by the mid-century. In that regard, the energy productivity and efficiency in materials consumption must increase so that economies could grow with less demand for energy and materials. The current state of technology and finance made that change possible. Enabling market conditions, where prices reflected the societal costs of greenhouse gas emissions, were needed, so that investment in higher efficiency in energy and material use and investment in carbon-neutral options were appropriately rewarded. Annual investments in mitigation, which included investment in efficiency improvement and energy decarbonization, would lead to a slowdown in the demand for energy and material input, facilitate the system transition to carbon neutrality and minimize the potential risks to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

29. On the other hand, failure to lower energy demands would increase potential reliance on carbon dioxide removal, a process of reducing the stock of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by means of planting trees, sequestering soil carbon, producing biomass energy with carbon capture and storage. All pathways to limit global warming to 1.5°C required carbon dioxide removal, which also had serious implications for the Sustainable Development Goals. While needed to compensate for emissions that were difficult to eliminate, such as those from transport, agriculture and industry, the carbon dioxide removal process would also result in large land and water footprints and could compete with other land uses and have significant impacts on agricultural and food systems and biodiversity. If the global temperature rose above the 1.5°C ceiling, then carbon dioxide removal would be further in demand. The lower the scale and speed of

deployment of that process, the better the chance would be for the Goals to be achieved. It was therefore clear that the approach to limit warming should be to aim for high-efficiency energy and materials consumption and food consumption that generated low levels of greenhouse gases.

30. IPCC had found that limiting warming to 1.5°C was unfeasible in a world characterized by inequality, poverty and a lack of international cooperation. Indeed, international cooperation that enhanced domestic capacities and access to finance and technology was key to enabling developing countries and vulnerable regions to strengthen their climate actions. Regions with a high dependence on fossil fuels for revenue and employment generation faced risks to their sustainable development; diversifying the economy could address those challenges. Public acceptance would also be key to transitioning to a carbon-neutral world. Redistributive policies across sectors and populations that shielded the poor and vulnerable could resolve trade-offs for a range of Goals, particularly those related to hunger, poverty and energy access, and would also facilitate public acceptance of transition measures. Collective action was needed at all levels to limit global warming to 1.5°C, taking into account equity and effectiveness. That would enable sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and a cleaner, sustainable, more productive, and stronger global economy.

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.