



UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development
Opening and High-level Policy Segment

13 Mar 2024, Geneva

Esteemed delegates,

My name is Goda Neverauskaitė, coming from ITUC, but now I am here today to speak on behalf of the Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism for the U.N.E.C.E region.

Six years. That is what we have **left** for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

We have spent more years making the same interventions than years that there is left for us to act.

We can tell you once again about all the people who have been displaced because of the climate crisis, lost to armed conflicts and crimes against humanity, suffering under brutal economic disparities, and the number of planetary boundaries that have already been broken

By the way it is six, the same number of years we have left!

Not only do we now risk inheriting a planet that will be unliveable for all species, but for some this is already a dire reality, such as for those people who are already denied the right to a dignified, healthy, and peaceful environment and life.

But we are here ready to collaborate with you because we really believe that the 2030 Agenda must be delivered, rather than becoming an international failure.

Civil society has come together online and yesterday in person at the Civil Society Forum to put concrete recommendations and demands to you for our common future. These are the outcomes of our discussions. We demand:

- A **structural economic system change.** We need degrowth and a drastic reduction of material use and emissions, to ensure we live well within planetary boundaries. That means redistributing power, valuing care work and putting in place social protection floors for ALL. It means green jobs and green transition. It means a real fossil fuel phase-out and no longer relying on false solutions.

- **Reverse the concerning trend of shrinking civic space.** Ensure the protection of fundamental freedoms and rights, the end to harassment of environmental and human right activists, punishing workers for trade union activities. We need to value an independent civil society, support for and integration of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, healthy democracy, through proper engagement mechanisms.
- **We demand a release of political prisoners**, including trade unionists and including civil society **activists - who advocate for peace, democracy and a healthy environment** - the number of whom has only increased, and not all of whom unfortunately have lived to see this day. Decriminalize civil society activism and promote democracy by safeguarding civic space.
- **Tax Justice and Social Corporate Responsibility** to hold accountability for negative externalities. Reject SDG washing and greenwashing, particularly in forums like climate negotiations such as COP28, uphold the “**polluters pay**” principle in sustainable development efforts.
- **Implement just transitions** to mitigate the social and economic impacts of environmental policies. Prioritise those furthest left behind because of the intersecting discriminations faced due to age, gender, disability, ethnicity, language, location and beyond.
- **Establish transparent stakeholder engagement** processes both nationally and internationally, ensuring meaningful participation of all stakeholders. Provide visa waivers for civil society participation and allocate proper financing to support their involvement.
- We need genuine commitment and action to address the root causes of **gender inequalities** - notably the inequitable distribution of unpaid care work - and advance women’s rights: a necessary condition to achieve the SDGs.
- **Address the Tokenization of Youth** in UN conferences by providing them with genuine opportunities to contribute and participate actively in decision-making processes.
- **We need Equitable Funding Distribution by** recognizing the lack of finance in regions such as Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Eastern Europe. Ensure these regions receive equitable funding similar to countries classified as the "Global South," enabling them to effectively implement sustainable development initiatives.

The progress in peacebuilding efforts is still lacking, moreover, the region got involved even in more devastating armed conflicts affecting people and the planet, getting us even further from SDGs.

We believe peace and visible progress on the 2030 Agenda is still possible and it should be built on solidarity and cooperation among Member States. We recognise the efforts of the U.N.E.C.E

in supporting this fragile cooperation and we call on all Member States to put political infighting behind and reboot cooperation and partnerships. Use the upcoming '*Summit of the Future*' as a platform for funding new meanings and interconnections for the sake of humanity who so much needs reconsideration of "business as usual" in all dimensions.

Thank you.