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Aligning SDGs with Human Rights- Sustainable Development Goals and the role of the Human Rights Institutions in its implementation

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I feel honored and have the special pleasure to welcome you today at the annual conference of the People's Advocate institution, "*Sustainable Development Goals and the role of Human Rights Institutions in their implementation*".

In September 2015, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted Agenda 2030 with 17 main Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 objectives, each of which directly or indirectly reflect human rights standards, and mainstream such principles related to human rights, as:

- Participation
- Accountability
- Non-discrimination

Many people today are marginalized especially the poor and the vulnerable due to gender, age, disability, ethnicity or geographical location.

Still today, there are large gaps between families living in rural and urban areas, and many families live in absolute and extreme poverty, being deprived of provision of and access to basic services.

Albania has embraced the objectives of sustainable development and all our joint work involving many institutional actors such as the Parliament, Local Governments, businesses, CSOs, etc., should aim at:

- Poverty eradication;
- elimination of inequality; and
- ensuring human dignity.

Under each objective contained in the "Agenda 2030, of the United Nations, as things stand today, we note that:

1- According to INSTAT data, about 14.3% of the population in our country live in absolute poverty with a real monthly consumption below 4891 lek, and 2.2% of the population live in extreme poverty. In the meantime, Albania has not declared a minimum living standard as a concept that is closely related to the goods that

individuals need to survive under current societal conditions, as well as a basis for establishing the types and amounts of benefits from social protection schemes, social insurance, etc, but also for crafting and maintaining a decent salary system.

2- It is necessary to take measures to eliminate hunger, achieve subsistence security and improve the population's nutritional basis through the promotion of sustainable agriculture;

3- There are still drawbacks in the provision of quality health services and steps need to be taken to bring about substantial and visible improvements in the system;

4- Quality and inclusive education should be provided for all, in particular for Roma and children with special needs;

5- There is still much to be done regarding gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Domestic violence remains a concern. Resources at the central and local level are not sufficient to help victims of domestic violence to rebuild their lives, through the provision of job and housing opportunities, among other things;

6- 7 Basic amenities such as water supply and sewage facilities should be provided for all, including through in-house plumbing; Electricity should be free for those families who are in extreme need and unable to pay for these public services;

8- It is necessary to create a business enabling environment to increase job creation and employment, mainly in the poorest and rural areas; specific vocational training should be designed and provided for those in need;

9- In addition, durable infrastructural works should be undertaken as a condition for inclusive and sustainable industrialization and innovative ideas should be encouraged;

10- Further measures should be taken to strengthen efforts to improve and provide broad access to services such as social housing; education and health; employment for Roma minority; Ongoing efforts should be made to eliminate all forms of discrimination, particularly against the LGBTI community, as well as against minorities;

11- Lack of an adequate legal framework guaranteeing the right to housing, has created serious problems and new social conflicts in the case of forced evictions. Such problems relate to failure to provide adequate housing conditions for low income families (in extreme or absolute poverty), families on the economic aid schemes, homeless women who have fallen victims to domestic violence, or even the category of former tenants housed in the state apartments. Current criteria established in the law do not provide for access to social housing for disadvantaged individuals and families. Even in cases of being housed in social apartments, the longevity of the solution is undermined by inability to pay due to low income or total lack of resources.

12- Efforts should be made to ensure sustainable consumption patterns, and to protect consumer rights;

13- Concrete measures should be taken to protect the environment and to counter the negative effects of climate change;

14- Access to justice should be provided and guaranteed for all; free legal aid should be available for the needy and the vulnerable; effective accountable and inclusive institutions should be created at all levels. Measures should be taken to ensure the independence of the judiciary; objective and impartial investigations should be instituted in cases of allegations of corruptions and/or unlawful interference. The necessary laws under the justice reform should be drafted and adopted to make the legal framework complete and the reform should take effect as soon as possible.

Dear participants,

As one of the actors involved in the protection and implementation of human rights, which constitute the basis for the Sustainable Development Goals, the People's Advocate has and should play a specific role in the process of implementing and monitoring the SDG Agenda.

Under the Merida Declaration "On the role of human rights institutions in Sustainable Development Goals", adopted in October 2015 in Mexico, the tasks before the People's Advocate include:

- Establishing mechanisms for the monitoring and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals;
- Creating synergy among the numerous actors involved in the realization of human rights by cooperating in joint capacity building and sharing of experiences,
- Data generation and creation of a database to identify the vulnerable groups and the individuals who are marginalized, for the purpose of attaining sustainable development goals for all groups and individuals;
- Strengthening cooperation with international partners to support human rights institutions with the development of tools, methodologies and capacity to monitor the implementation of sustainable development goals.
- With UN support, urge the government to prepare an action plan outlining how Albania intends to pursue Sustainable Development Goals; the plan should contain reasonable timelines to ensure the adequate implementation of the Agenda.
- Work with stakeholders to establish a high level coordination council which should meet periodically to oversee the Government's efforts in implementing the Agenda. The council should be made up of the main actors mentioned in the Agenda and the sustainable development goals.

Our vision for the future, in line with that of all stakeholders involved in the realization of this ambition is that "no one is left behind" and that human dignity is guaranteed and human rights and honored and guaranteed to all individuals at all times and places.