July 22, 2014

Ambassadors Csaba Kőrösi and Macharia Kamau
Co-chairs, United Nations
Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals
New York

Your Excellencies,

As members of the SDSN’s Thematic Group on Social Inclusion: Gender, Inequality and Human Rights, we would like to congratulate you on the Open Working Group Draft Goals, circulated on July 18, 2014. The inclusion of Goals 5 and 10, in particular, shows the strong emphasis Members States have placed on issues of inequality throughout your deliberations.

Inequality, including gender inequality, has been a recurrent theme throughout the SDG process. Strong emphasis was placed on it in the High Level Panel report, the SDSN’s Action Agenda, the UN Task Team report, and so on. In particular, there has been strong support for effective disaggregation, so we can track progress made by each of the major social and economic groups, to ensure that no one is left behind. We strongly support the HLP’s commitment; “to ensure equality of opportunity, relevant indicators should be disaggregated with respect to income (especially for the bottom 20%), gender, location, age, people living with disabilities, and relevant social group. Targets will only be considered ‘achieved’ if they are met for all relevant income and social groups.”

It is our hope that this proviso, although not mentioned in your draft, will be considered in future deliberations of the Member States and included in the Secretary General’s report later this year.

We have six further observations on the OWG draft that we wish to share with you. Although your deliberations have finished, we hope that these recommendations will prove useful to you and other Member States in future discussions on the goals and targets.

1. We welcome the inclusion of Goal 10, which aims to “Reduce inequality within and among countries.” We are particularly eager that this goal include broader measures of social inequality, and most noticeably measures the condition of minority groups and indigenous peoples who are currently absent from the OWG outcome document.

2. We welcome the inclusion of Goal 5 on gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls. We commend the move to end all forms of discrimination and eliminate all violence. We believe the focus now needs to move to the process by which this can be achieved, which includes changing social norms as well as improving policing and recourse to justice, and suggests the need to support the ongoing work of women’s movements across the globe. We very much hope to see a
strong focus on the means of realising this goal – the ‘how’ - within future reports on this agenda and within the indicator framework, once decided.

3. We were surprised that many of the targets under Goal 5 lacked clear timelines, as per the other targets in the document. We strongly recommend the use of time-bound targets which convey a sense of urgency. For targets pertaining to violence or harmful practices we recommend the objective be to end these scourges ‘immediately’. For other more intractable issues pertaining to discrimination it may be more appropriate to use a target of 2030.

4. We encourage Member States to consider rephrasing targets to convey women and girl’s rights, including the right to live free from violence, for example changing target 5.2 to “Realize every woman and girl’s right to live free from violence, including by immediately eradicating all harmful traditional practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, trafficking and sexual exploitation.”

5. We remain concerned about the expression of sexual and reproductive rights within Goal 5, Target 6, in particular the inclusion of rights only in application to reproductive rights. The right of women to have control over and make decisions concerning their own sexuality was recognized in the 1995 Beijing Conference for Women and Platform for Action. We endorse the recommendations of the Major Groups, outlined in their submission to the Open Working Group on 16th June.

6. We welcome the inclusion of Goal 16 and reaffirm the critical importance of peace and security for sustainable and inclusive development. In an increasingly globalized world we cannot ignore issues such as the spread of extremism, in its many forms, and the closing space for civil society, particularly women and girls. The whole SDG agenda must embrace the concept of unity in diversity and proactively seek to support socio-cultural, political, economic, and security policies that strengthen social cohesion. We also urge the inclusion of timelines for each target.

We hope that these suggestions prove useful in your final deliberations.

Once again, we congratulate you on your bold leadership of the Open Working Group and commend the prominent attention given to gender inequality, as well as inequality of opportunity, throughout.

With assurances of our highest esteem,

Professor Joshua Castellino

Ms. Bineta Diop

Co-Chairs and on behalf of the SDSN Thematic Group on Social Inclusion