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World Forum
for
Democracy

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Keynote speech by

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Prime Minister of Norway

on the occasion of the
5th World Forum for Democracy

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Secretary General Jagland, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to commend the Council of Europe and Secretary General Jagland for creating the annual World Forum for Democracy together with the European Parliament and the French authorities.

The fact that people from around 100 countries are participating here today shows that this forum is highly relevant.

In its recent history, Europe has experienced the tragic alternatives to democracy, the complete opposite of cooperation among nations, and a total lack of respect for every individual's inalienable rights. This resulted in world war, the loss of tens of millions of lives, and the genocide we know as the Holocaust.

The United Nations and the Council of Europe were both built on the ashes of World War 2. UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld famously said that, and I quote: "*The UN was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell*". The same could be said about the Council of Europe.

Saving humanity from hell is a task with no expiry date. Non-democratic and xenophobic sentiments are still a reality that needs to be counter balanced – not least through education.

I am very pleased to see so many people who support democracy and equality through education here today.

It is no secret that I view quality education, particularly for girls, as the best investment for sustainable development there is. If you educate a girl, she will take charge of her life, educate her children, and help lift her community and propel her nation forward.

The mix of people here today is exactly the mix needed for democratic innovation, equality and sustainable development. Forging partnerships involving governments, civil society, the business sector and academia is **how** to get things done in the modern world.

As co-chair of the UN Secretary-General's Sustainable Development Goals Advocates, I am here to talk about **what** needs to be done, and the important role of the Council of Europe in these efforts.

The Sustainable Development Goals – or SDGs – were adopted by 193 states, including the 47 member states of the Council of Europe, at the UN Summit just over a year ago.

The SDGs are the roadmap to the future we want. This is a world free from poverty and hunger, where gender equality has been achieved and human rights respected, where no one is left behind, and where our environment and climate are protected.

To get there, we need to move forward step by step every day. This is the best way to address the underlying causes of today's major challenges – not only poverty and hunger, but also conflict, violent extremism, forced migration, youth unemployment and global warming.

This set of goals is the main track for political action. It is a common plan agreed at the highest political level by all the countries of the world.

It also reflects a major change in the way we think about international development:

First: The SDGs are universal. All countries have work to do at home. No matter what their level of economic development. To take my own country – Norway – as an example, we have to increase the completion rate in our upper secondary schools, improve the overall quality of education, and ensure that all young people are either in education or have a job.

Second: The SDG agenda is holistic. It integrates action on economic, social and environmental dimensions of development in all countries and at the global level. We know that unless we stop harmful climate change, we will not be able to eradicate poverty or end hunger, and there will be more conflicts.

This means that the SDGs are indivisible. Given the topic of this year's World Forum for Democracy I will concentrate on **SDGs 4, 16 and 17**. I will explain what these three goals are about and what needs to be done to achieve them.

SDG 4. This goal deals with quality education. This is a human right – something that all people are entitled to. Quality education for all means equal opportunities for all. Education is as important for equality as universal suffrage is for democracy.

Quality education will strengthen the results of our efforts to achieve all the SDGs.

It provides children and young people with the skills and knowledge they need to do well in life. It strengthens their social skills and their awareness of civic duties. It will enable them to take part in political processes as they grow up and help them see the connection between paying taxes and receiving services.

Both from a rights perspective and from an overall sustainable development perspective, we need innovative approaches to scale up the financing and delivery of quality education.

Norway is pleased to be co-chairing the Education 2030 Steering Committee, in which the Council of Europe also takes part. This steering committee guides and monitors global education efforts and builds partnerships for SDG 4.

The Council of Europe and UNESCO have cooperated on developing the target and indicators on education for sustainable development. This is a prime example of how international organisations should work together.

All education systems should promote global citizenship by teaching human rights, gender equality, peace and non-violence within and between nations.

Conflict puts development in reverse, often for decades. Citizenship education is a vital tool in a long-term conflict prevention strategy and for achieving sustainable development.

I appreciate the Council of Europe's work on global citizenship education and on a framework of competences for democratic culture. The Council of Europe is perhaps the most competent organisation in these areas.

The Council of Europe has also established the European Wergeland Centre to promote democratic citizenship, human rights and intercultural understanding.

The Centre works with national authorities across Europe. Its activities, including the Schools for Democracy Programme in Ukraine, helps to build national ownership and responsibility, while supporting local and national capacity-building.

Its services are provided free of charge and are available for all member states of the Council of Europe. Norway is proud to host the European Wergeland Centre.

There is a direct relationship between education and **SDG 16**. This goal is dedicated to the rule of law, peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions.

The rule of law is essential for achieving the SDGs. Without the predictability and security created by the rule of law, private enterprise grinds to a halt along with foreign trade and investments.

The absence of the rule of law exposes societies to corruption, bribery and tax evasion. Tax evasion is stealing money that could be used to create strong, healthy and well educated societies. Among the institutions most affected by corruption are, ironically, the judiciary and police. Many of us will remember the global corruption scandal that was exposed this spring which became known as the Panama Papers. In this context I see SDG 16, which commits us to developing accountable institutions at all levels, as a "Panama vaccine". At the London conference on Exposing Corruption in May this year I also made the point that we need to put an end to corruption if we are to achieve the SDGs.

Most, if not all, the targets relating to **SDG 16** are relevant to the Council of Europe and its focus on democratic security.

The annual report of the Secretary General points to the empirical fact that democratic societies rarely, if ever, go to war with each other – and that democratic practices likewise protect states from internal strife.

The report highlights five fundamental building blocks of democratic security:

- efficient and independent judiciaries;
- free media and freedom of expression;
- freedom of assembly and a vibrant civil society;
- legitimate and democratic institutions; and
- inclusive societies.

The Secretary General's report, however, paints a worrying picture of the situation in Europe, showing how media freedom and judicial independence are declining in some member states.

Fighting violent extremism and radicalisation is necessary to achieve and maintain democratic security. The Council of Europe has a lot to offer in this area too. Targeted action within the organisation's three pillars – human rights, democracy and the rule of law – will in itself contribute to this objective.

SDG 17 is about strengthening domestic resource mobilisation to improve tax collection and other types of revenue generation. It also links the SDGs to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development.

If we are to achieve the SDGs universally, leaving no one behind, a global partnership that includes financial aid will be crucial. Especially for some of the world's poorest countries and for the most vulnerable areas and populations.

What is needed is smart development aid that acts as a catalyst for larger financial flows, generated, for example, through private sector investments.

SDG 17 also points to the need for North–South and South–South partnerships and triangular cooperation on a range of areas such as technology transfer, capacity building and trade.

The involvement of the Council of Europe and its member states is vital for SDG 17 cooperation and partnerships.

Let me now turn to global education, what the needs are, and Norway's efforts to help meet them.

Today, 263 million children and young people are out of school. Many more are held back due to poor schooling. Unless action is taken, 420 million children will not acquire basic skills by 2030.

This means that millions of young people will lose out on opportunities to escape poverty, find a job and enjoy a decent life.

In turn, this will mean that per capital GDP in low-income countries will be 70 % lower in 2050 than it would have been if all children had access to good quality education.

We can change this if we take massive action on education now.

Last year, to kick-start a renewed effort on education, I initiated the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity – together with the Director-General of UNESCO and the Presidents of Chile, Indonesia and Malawi.

The goal of this initiative is to get all young people into school and learning within one generation.

It is an ambitious goal, but it is achievable with strong domestic efforts supported by international partners.

We strongly support the recommendation to establish a Financing Compact for the Learning Generation.

The compact will enable governments that are ready to invest substantially in their own education systems to receive international support.

I believe this is our best shot at getting all children and young people into school and learning within one generation.

Norway is doing its part. When my Government took office three years ago, we decided to put education first in Norway's development policy.

We are giving priority to girls' education, quality in learning, vocational training and education in emergencies and protracted crises.

In 2017, we will reach our goal of doubling development aid for education within the current four-year parliamentary period.

Norway also helped initiate Education Cannot Wait – the fund for education in crises. It has raised well over 100 million US dollars since it was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in May. Education in crisis and conflict needs to be a top priority for donors and aid agencies. The 37 million children presently out of school in countries affected by crises and conflicts must not be left behind.

More than 8 % of Norway's humanitarian assistance is earmarked for education. Syria and its neighbouring countries are given high priority.

I would like to encourage the Council of Europe to continue and further strengthen its work for sustainable peace and development. As recent developments in Europe have shown, this is as important as ever. The same goes for all of you who are taking part in this forum. National efforts and international cooperation to reach the SDGs is the long-term solution to our common challenges.

In closing, I would like to remind us all that global goals are about improving the lives of individual people. Charlie Chaplin, in his 1940 satire *The Great Dictator*, nailed this sentiment beautifully, and I quote: "*We all want to help one another. Human beings are like that. We want to live by each other's happiness - not by each other's misery.*"

Thank you.