



**KINGDOM OF BELGIUM**

**KINGDOM OF BELGIUM**

National statement delivered by

Ambassador Karl Lagatie, Chargé d'affaires, a. i.

**HLPF 2023 - General Debate**

New York, 19 July 2023

---

Mrs. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies & Gentlemen,

Sustainable development was put high on the international agenda at UNCED 1992. Fifteen years later, when the financial and economic crisis struck, sustainable development was declared almost dead and buried by some international bodies. Fortunately, the perseverance of various UN agencies and prominent personalities led to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs can no longer be ignored as our compass towards sustainable development

Belgium regrets that despite earlier commitments and efforts being undertaken at various levels worldwide, the implementation of Agenda 2030 is clearly off track, with many adverse impacts on people and communities. As the Secretary-General has stated in his latest Progress report just 12 percent of the SDGs targets are on track. Progress on 50 percent is weak and insufficient. Worst of all, we have stalled or gone into reverse on more than 30 percent of the SDGs. There is clear need to step up efforts in a global environment of multiple crises. We therefore hope that the upcoming SDG-Summit in September will serve as a catalyst for Agenda 2030, in line with the Secretary-General's request towards world leaders to deliver a Rescue Plan for People and Planet.

The whole of society approach inherent to the 2030 Agenda is of particular importance. This not only means that we need everyone on board to achieve the SDGs but also that we make our policies coherence for sustainable development and consider the transboundary effects of our domestic policies. The 'trade-offs' of each public policy must be taken into account in the perspective of a ecological & just transition. Our recently introduced export ban that prohibits the export into countries outside the EU of toxic chemicals that are already prohibited in Europe, is an example of policies that address the negative transboundary effects.

The SDGs should be integrated at various policy levels with quantified objectives to define the height of the ambition, according to the challenges and the means as does the Government of the Walloon Region in Belgium.

Belgium recognizes the key role of local governments in realizing the 2030 Agenda. Belgian cities and municipalities are true pioneers in the local translation of the SDGs and have therefore received a prominent place in our VNR.

To put the world on track for sustainable development and to face the loss and damage that is suffered by the most vulnerable countries, the finance gap between the billions provided and the trillions needed for a green, just and resilient transition must be closed. It is critical that we look at the climate finance question in a broad fashion. As Belgium, we are presently exploring debt for climate swaps as an instrument to reinforce environmental action of vulnerable countries, as we do for example with Mozambique. Since 2020 Belgium has also significantly increased its contribution to international climate finance (25% increase).

This year, Belgium presents its second Voluntary National Review which is an important stocktaking that will guide our country on the way ahead for the coming years. In my presentation tomorrow I will come back in more detail on the SDGs under focus this year, but let me take this opportunity to emphasize SDG6 as an important priority for Belgium, especially in the year of the first UN Water conference in almost 50 years.

Belgium is party to the UNECE Water Convention on Transboundary Watercourses since 1997 and the Protocol Water and Health. Through scientific expertise in the regional governments in Belgium are actively involved in the UNESCO Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme. These governments have also various engagements with partner countries via financial programs and by investing in capacity building locally and sharing experiences and knowledge of water technology. The government of the Flemish region for example is strongly committed to make its territory both more drought-resilient and more flood-resilient through the Blue Deal in dialogue with all actors, partners and stakeholders. The aim is to truly make a systemic change towards a climate-proof management and use of our water resources.

We firmly believe it is a necessary and inspiring approach to realize the SDGs hand-in-hand with our policy goals for biodiversity restoration, climate adaptation, carbon storage and sustainable land use.

While SDG 5 is not a particular focus of this HLPF I find it important to emphasize the importance of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. A concrete example of this is our fight against femicide, which is a priority for Belgium. A new pioneering law on femicide was recently adopted by the federal Parliament to provide Belgium with a set of tools to measure femicide and protect victims. Moreover, gender is also integral for the achievement of all the SDGs and for a better future for all. We will therefore continue to use tools and strategies such as positive action, gender mainstreaming and gender-disaggregated data to pursue the SDGs.

Lastly, I want to give a shout-out to the young people around the world and in Belgium who are speaking out. For better environmental education, for qualitative affordable and safe housing for everyone as well as for sustainable means of transport. I agree with them that Youth mental health should be a priority related to SDG 3.

Let me conclude by reaffirming Belgium's commitment to multilateralism. Let us continue to work together and deepen our dialogue and partnerships. We are halfway the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the clock is ticking. The time for us to act is now. We owe it to the most vulnerable people on the planet, to future generations and ourselves.