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SDG 16

Progressive implementation of the 2030 Agenda depends on achieving sustainable peace

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In September 2015, a universal commitment to achieving sustainable development for all and leaving no one behind was made with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Labelled as "one of the more controversial goals,"[1] or that having "contentious origins"[2] SDG 16 took its place among the 17 goals, reaffirming that peace, justice, effective and accountable institutions as well as inclusive societies are prerequisites for sustainable development. SDG 16 became distinctive with its transformative nature, requiring genuine implementation, effective monitoring and enhanced accountability for overall progress of the 2030 Agenda. However, currently there is no significant progress with regard to SDG 16.

A quick review of the global peace and security situation presents a bleak picture. Looking at the Middle East alone:

▌ Of the more than 65 million people displaced worldwide, a report by the UN revealed[3] that around 5 million refugees in countries neighbouring Syria affected by the war awaiting a political solution to end the war and achieve transitional justice.

▌ The world is challenged by 71 different conflicts, among them 11 civil wars with high atrocity; six of them are in the Arab region, while eight are in the Middle East.[4]

▌ It has been nearly 70 years that the Palestinians face illegal occupation for whom peace and self-determination go hand in hand.

▌ Most recently the former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was released (after six years house arrest), which in the words of human rights defender Malek Adly is "a blatant example of the selective prosecution that exists, bearing testament to the increasing politicization of the courts".[5]

In such a context, the transformative nature of SDG 16 makes it uniquely powerful, yet also difficult to achieve as it requires significant shifts in all its interlinked aspects: peace should be sustainable, positive (i.e., not simply the absence of violence); accountability should be mutual; inclusive societies requires the adoption of new social contracts; justice must be comprehensive including social, economic, environmental, cultural and political justice. In addition to this, the commitment to SDG 16 should be further strengthened together with resources allocated to

1 http://sdg.iisd.org/news/undp-administrator-discusses-post-2015-agenda-sdg-16-and-soft-means-of-implementation/.

2 www.idlo.int/news/highlights/opportunities-and-challenges-implementing-goal-16.

3 UNHCR (2016).

4 www.conflictmap.org/conflicts.

5 www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/03/egypt-mubarak-release-mixed-reactions-ahmed-douma.html.

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development financing, rather than military spending and investments. Global military expenditure in 2015 was US$ 1,676 billion, about 2.3 percent of the world's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP).[6] Reallocation of resources to development would be key to achieving the SDGs, and a shift from militarization as business to development financing would be central for achieving SDG 16.

Peace: give (positive and sustainable) peace a chance

In 1969 John Lennon's lyrics summarizes it so simply: "All we are saying is give peace a chance." But we need to stress now that the peace should be positive and sustainable. In other words, political will to give peace a chance and thus arrive at an absence of violence, conflict and war should be complemented by a comprehensive approach that encompasses all aspects of human security. More than two decades ago, in 1994, the UN Human Development Report introduced the concept of human security.[7] With its seven identified components, namely economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security, human security–defined simply as freedom from fear and freedom from want–necessitated a shift from a State-centric security approach. This transition was affirmed in the report, which stated that "it is now time to make a transition from the narrow concept of national security to the all-encompassing concept of human security".[8]

Nevertheless the global context now is in reverse mode; recent practices and discourse on security promote national security foremost. It is easy to recall the US President promising to build a border wall to boost national security or the EU that made border deals with Turkey or proposed a new Migration Policy Framework to Southern Mediterranean partner countries within which the priority is to keep refugees closer to home, thus a burden-transferring for the sake of EU's security.

With its 10 targets related to outcomes and two related to means of implementation, SDG 16 does not integrate all components of human security, and thus do not entail a comprehensive approach to achieve sustainable and positive peace. Yet with a holistic approach, the implementation of the 17 goals, and the targets of SDG 16 specifically, could ensure progress in all seven areas of human security.

A close look at SDG 16 nevertheless shows that the implementation of targets 16.4, 16.5, 16.6, 16.7 and 16.8–addressing illicit financial and arms flows, corruption, transparency, inclusive and representative decision-making and global governance would be decisive. This is mainly because these targets address systemic issues in the current neoliberal order, including lack of transparency and shrinking policy space. However, the indicators for these targets remain mainly quantitative, thus requiring those monitoring and advocating for genuine implementation to continuously tackle qualitative aspects. A framework for positive and sustainable peace should be the umbrella for these efforts, to turn the targets into effective outcomes. Yet, this is not enough and should be complemented with an elaborated approach of justice, accountability and inclusivity.

Justice: provide social justice for all

How can we achieve justice? The question can lead to different answers, when one sees justice as a relative or subjective concept. But by following a rights-based approach, as the 2030 Agenda does, justice can be particularly interpreted as providing social justice for all.

This initially requires a U-turn from long-promoted neoliberal policy approaches. The latter, entailing trade liberalization, privatization, efforts to attract of foreign direct investment compounded with a reduced role of the State and shrinking policy space, led to widening and deepening inequalities within and among countries, thus resulted in a lack of social justice. The United Nations dedicates each year one day, namely 20 February, to social justice, as a symbolic act to remember us that we have to struggle for addressing inequalities and social injustices in the remaining 364 days of the year.

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6 www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2016/opportunity-cost-world-military-spending.

7 UNDP (1994).

8 Ibid., p. 24.

In this struggle, a revision of redistribution policies are at the forefront. Ensuring progressive taxation, social protection for all and addressing informal labour through sustainable employment generation policies are a must. Such policy revisions should be strengthened with a shift from a rentier State to a developmental State within which policies are rights-based and people-centred and decision-making processes are inclusive and representing different opinions.

In such an approach, the rule of law and justice would be enjoyed not only under the shadow of police forces, courts and prisons. With target 16.3 governments commit to "promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all". This target is quite comprehensive as it covers injustices at national and international levels and stresses the "equal" access to justice for "all". This would also include, for example, injustices deriving from trade agreements.

To implement the goal of social justice for all, new social contracts between the State and the citizen could be created that can tackle inequalities at multiple levels, be it geographic, political, gender, ethical, religious, social, economic, cultural and environmental. However state accountability is not enough alone. We actually need mutual accountability to be enhanced through the implementation of the Agenda.

Accountability: enhance mutual accountability

State accountability is critical for citizens, who should be able to hold their governments accountable for their commitments and demand effective policies to address core development issues. SDG 16 tackles the goal of accountability with a specific target, namely target 16.6, requiring the development of "effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels". As indicators of progress the indicator framework identifies the allocation of primary government expenditures by sector and the proportion of the population satisfied with their experience of public services. Nevertheless, the practice we face is not as simple as it reads. Governments remain restricted in adopting policies and measures to achieve this target, as they have to respect the condition-

alities attached to financing and follow neoliberal policy prescriptions by the international financial institutions (IFIs) and others. These prescriptions have resulted in the adoption of rigid austerity measures by many countries, rising unemployment and the widespread violation of the right to social protection for many, including women, elderly and disabled people. In other words, effective institutions fail, as private interests overcome public interests and rules set by the multinational corporate powers and the IFIs became dominant over national interests.

Moreover, SDG 16 remains limited in scope when it focuses only on State accountability as primary towards achieving peaceful societies. All development actors' accountability is mutual and interlinked towards realizing societal peace. Yet not all of them receive the same attention. Mostly underexposed is the accountability of the private sector, particularly when it comes to the protection against human rights violations. Let us consider the case of a female worker in a textile company in a developing country. Lack of decent work conditions, no social protection and maybe even sexual harassment at work should point fingers not only at the State but also at companies and their customers, often multinational retailing corporations. A long-term perspective on accountability would require legally binding accountability rules for all development actors, including domestic companies and multinational corporations, in order to implement the SDGs. In this context, measuring progress in the provision of certain public services or more budget resources allocated to health and education that would impact directly the life of a woman would only be considered as short-term progress, not addressing any of the root causes of inequalities she faces. But how can she be even heard if there is no enabling environment for her to speak up?

Inclusiveness: support an enabling environment

While the indicator on the number of people satisfied with public services is useful in relating the target to the experience of real people, progress on this indicator requires an enabling environment to make their voices heard. One would not feel left behind, if his/her opinion were asked, heard and taken into consideration. This is not possible through tick-box exercis-

Private Military and Security Companies – obstacle to the realization of SDG 16

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The private military and security industry has been growing steadily since the mid-1980s. In 2009, the global security market was estimated to be worth about US$ 100-165 billion per year, with an annual growth rate of 7-8 percent.[1] This means that the industry today is likely to be worth about US$ 170-300 billion. In addition, a 2011 study estimated the number of employees in the formal private security sector to be between 19.5 and 25.5 million worldwide, a number which exceeds the number of police officers at the global level.[2] Today, Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) provide a wide variety of services, ranging from support to state militaries engaged in conflict to guard services for corporations and individuals and the operation of private prisons.

The private military and security industry directly affects the realization of SDG 16 to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels".

This industry not only directly contributes to conflict violence, it also allows for the reproduction of socio-economic inequality.

PMSCs and conflict. PMSCs play a key role in making conflict possible by outsourcing its political, economic and human cost. In Afghanistan and Iraq, for instance, the USA has been able to rely on a workforce of low-paid employees from poor countries, who had been hired by PMSCs sometimes without being aware that they would be working in a war zone.[3] PMSCs have made democratic societies less averse to war by hiding its costs. In an internal memo, the British Ministry of Defence has highlighted that "neither the media nor the public in the West appears to identify with contractors in the way they do with their military personnel. Thus casualties from within the contractorised force are more acceptable in pursuit of military ends than those among our own forces".[4]

In other words, the private military and security industry allows governments to bypass the democratic process by making war more palatable to the public and less amenable to scrutiny.[5]

Availability of weapons. According to a conservative estimate, PMSCs held between 1.7 and 3.7 million firearms worldwide in 2011. This excludes undeclared and illegal weapons, which would likely substantially increase this number. Indeed, PMSCs have been reported to illegally acquire weapons (and poorly stock them) in places such as Afghanistan, Brazil, India, Iraq and Tanzania.[6] The private military and security industry thus increases the availability of weapons in countries both at peace and at war, and increases the risk that these weapons will be used against civilians. A 2009 survey in Israel, for instance, found a link between incidents of domestic violence and homicide and firearms licensed to private security guards.[7]

PMSCs and socio-economic inequality. The private military and security industry has particularly proliferated in States that experience high levels of inequality between wealthy and poor citizens.

1   Abrahamsen/Williams (2009).
2   Florquin (2011).
3   See for instance Stillman (2011).
4   Quoted in: www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/sep/26/mod-study-sell-wars-public.
5   Avant/Sigelman (2010).
6   Florquin (2011).
7   Mazali (2009).

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As inequalities grow, the rich increasingly barricade themselves in fortified homes guarded by armed personnel, thus bypassing often unreliable police services. This is part of a broader trend that sees the wealthy disengaging from public services. While it is most obvious in emerging economies such as Brazil and South Africa, it also affects wealthier states such as the USA.[8] By providing the security services that allow the wealthy to isolate themselves from the rest of society, the private military and security industry plays a key role in exacerbating inequality.

The prison-industrial complex. In recent years, the private military and security industry has expanded its activities to the management of private prisons and detention centres for immigrants. G4S, the largest private security company in the world, has run prisons (in the UK and South Africa, among others) and immigration detention centres (e.g., in the UK and Australia). According to many critics, the privatization of the prison system is directly leading to an increase in incarceration rates. The American Civil Liberty Union (ACLU), for instance, argues that the construction of prisons run on a for-profit basis leads to unjust incarceration, which disproportionately affects marginalized minorities.[9]

Efforts at better regulation of the private military and security industry go only some way towards addressing these pressing issues. Ultimately, PMSCs are not only a symptom of political choices that have led to conflict and increased inequality, they also make these very choices possible.

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8   Pastor (2003).

9   Shapiro (2011).

es and consultations done randomly. People should enjoy fundamental freedoms of assembly, expression and association, should have access to timely, reliable information and resources to actively engage in public policy-making. In response, multi-stakeholder national dialogues should be a common practice, through which transparency is preserved in all policy areas, including key policies like trade, development, investment and so on. National social dialogue should have all necessary tools at diverse levels supported by representative institutions accessible to all.

Unfortunately shrinking civic space is the reality for both North and South: take the case of a human rights defender facing human rights violations due to a travel ban, imprisonment, arbitrary detention or a protest against police intervention. Arrests of protestors occur in many countries. However calls for human dignity, including respect for these fundamental freedoms will always be made and never be wiped away. Indeed when non-violent marches, like the Women's March in the USA and in several other countries in January 2017, occurred, we all felt hopeful for the future. Likewise when the Tunisian Quartet won the Nobel Prize in 2015 or the Syrian White Helmets were nominated in 2016, our trust in people's power come into daylight once again.

In this regard, SDG 16's specific targets are important in terms of altering the situation at the national level (16.10 on access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms specifically), but inclusivity is relevant beyond the national level. Inequalities and imbalances in representation have to be addressed at international level as well. Thus target 16.8 is complementary to inclusivity, aiming to "broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance". However such institutional reforms would remain only a small step in response to the overall need for structural changes in the development paradigm promoted. The development needs and how the institutions of global governance address these development needs must be the key question kept in mind.

Conclusion

The 2030 Agenda makes the strong link between establishing sustainable peace and security, building democracy, promoting human rights, and implementing relevant policies for social justice and sustainable development. All of these elements are listed in SDG 16 and its targets. It is consequently obvious that the overall assessment of SDG 16 is one of the most difficult and complicated.

Effectively, the security conditions across the globe are deteriorating. Armed conflicts are increasing worldwide both in their number and in atrocity, resulting in millions of refugees, internally displaced people and migrants, besides the huge loss of human and physical resources. Inequality is increasing due to the unprecedented concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. All these factors and many others show the enormous difficulties that the efforts to achieve SDG 16 are facing but makes its implementation even more critical. Therefore SDG 16 ought to be prioritized and set the framework for all the other goals and targets in order to really achieve sustainable development for all.

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Whistleblower protection –
how serious are governments to address corruption

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The UN estimates that US$ 1 trillion is paid in bribes per year, while more than twice that amount – US$ 2.6 trillion – is stolen annually through corruption.[1] This corresponds to more than 5 percent of global GDP. In turn, the findings of a recent study by the OECD indicates that fraud and wrongdoing are more likely to occur in organizations that are closed and secretive.[2]

Whistleblowing is a key tool to detect fraud and wrongdoing – whistleblower protection can facilitate workers' effectiveness in stopping wrongdoing at an early stage through voicing their concern before scandals erupt and stakeholders incur huge damages.

However, regardless of the progress achieved in the last decade and the surge in the implementation of whistleblower protection frameworks and awareness raising in many countries, some high-profile cases have also evidenced the shortcomings, both in the law and the practice. The lack of dedicated and comprehensive laws is one of them. The legal protection is often scattered into many different legislations, with emphasis in the reporting chan-

nels and the facilities to disclose the information. As a result, workers who blow the whistle still face harassment, retaliation and threats. Also, the lack of clarity and a coherent approach on what can be considered a 'protected disclosure' have led to whistleblowers being dismissed and even sentenced to jail for breaching confidential and non-disclosure agreements. Other frameworks also include a protection akin to witness-protection programmes. While this may offer a shield against harassment and threats, it fails at protecting whistleblowers' jobs.

A new PSI report provides arguments, evidence and examples on how a robust protection programme for whistleblowers with the active support of trade unions is a major – if not the most important – tool to fight corruption.[3] Some of the key findings of the report are:

▌ Whistleblowing arrangements are an important means of detecting fraud; however, whistleblowing by employees is a more effective way of bringing wrongdoing to light than direct observation, routine controls, internal audits, external

investigation and external complaints. A recent Global Fraud Report showed that in 32 percent of cases where fraud was uncovered, an employee had blown the whistle to provide information that facilitated an investigation. In the USA, 48 percent of cases where fraud was uncovered were facilitated by employees making whistleblower disclosures.

▌ The lack of whistleblowing protection frameworks leads to many forms of retaliation and reprisals, namely: ostracism, demotion, job loss, loss of income, assault and even murder. A series of studies in the US public sector suggests between 16 and 38 percent of workers who blow the whistle suffer retaliation. Similar percentages of whistleblower retaliation were found in Australia and the UK. However, in Norway retaliation rates are much lower – between 7 and 18 percent – thanks to strong legislation and very high unionization rates.

▌ Based on an estimate in 13 countries, the number of workers who need whistleblower protection at some point is estimated at 7 percent of the global workforce.

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1   UNODC (2016).
2   OECD (2016).

3   PSI (2016).

▌ Whistleblowing to the media represents only the tip of the whistleblowing iceberg. Whistleblowers tend to raise their concerns with different audiences throughout the process, and the vast majority of whistleblowers tend to raise their concerns internally more than once before going external, if they go external at all. Findings show that 97 percent of whistleblowing starts as voicing a concern internally, and 90 percent remains internal.

▌ Whistleblowing legislation and policies also carry a cost. However, whistleblower programmes show that the benefits outweigh these costs. The involvement of whistleblowers in uncovering fraud and other wrongdoing implies longer regulatory proceedings, and thus increased costs. However, whistleblower involvement helps regulators to build stronger cases. The benefits of stronger cases are a higher success rate in proceedings, and higher monetary penalties. A specific whistleblowing framework for employees who can disclose inside knowledge or organizational wrongdoing is a necessary element of an anti-corruption system.

▌ Based on 37 years of lessons learned, the six key provisions of robust whistleblower protection legislation include: burden of proof on the employer, forum (independence of enforcement agencies), final relief, interim relief, corrective action and support services (education and outreach). Although there are many examples of best practices on these six key provisions, the overall picture of whether and to what extent these key provisions are implemented in whistleblower legislation, is mixed.

This calls for a benchmarking initiative – a robust whistleblower protection framework to shield workers fighting corruption, but also to make the fight against corruption a credible and serious commitment. There is an important role here for social partners and the ILO. For instance, whistleblower protection is gaining momentum within the trade union movement – in addition to several national initiatives, European trade unions are leading a campaign backed by the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) and PSI.[4]

The ILO was one of the first international organizations to address this issue. The Convention on Termination of Employment of 1982 was one of the first international instruments to include whistleblower protection by providing that filing a complaint or participating in proceedings against an employer are not valid reasons for dismissal and by establishing that the burden for proving the reason for dismissal should rest on the employer. This reverse burden of proof has been essential in protecting whistleblowers. Thus the ILO has a role again in taking that protection further and making sure there is a solid international standard in place.

If governments are really serious about addressing corruption as part of the 2030 Agenda and SDG 16, they should take action on the protection of whistleblowers right now.

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4 https://whistleblowerprotection.eu/.