DRAFT KEYNOTE- Joan Carling

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly impacted every aspect of our lives. To advance the SDGs, we must address the underlying structural inequalities and systemic discrimination that have been laid bare by COVID-19. This includes tackling issues such as racism, unequal access to healthcare and education particularly by women,  indigenous peoples and remote communities; the lack of social protection for  workers and marginalized sectors; thesectors  the digital divide among others. We must prioritize investments in public health systems and infrastructures, inclusive and quality education that reach  those in remote or marginalized areas, improving digital infrastructure, and addressing the barriers faced by women and girls in accessing education and health. We must also address the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on workers  who have been disproportionately affected by job losses and the increased care responsibilities for women. We also need to  address the social determinants of health, such as access to clean water, nutritious food, and safe housing, to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to lead a healthy life including persons with disabilities. sectors

Economic disparities have deepened in many countries, with marginalized groups being disproportionately affected. Economic recovery must  transform the current exploitative and unsustainable system of production and consumption to  prioritize the needs and rights of marginalized sectors and dismantle the control of resources by ruling elites and corporations.  Actions shall  include implementation of  specific policies for accountable  business operations and  equitable trade relations; responsible and sustainable use of resources to support the basic needs and social services of marginalized sectors, stronger and equitable social protection systems, creation of decent and sustainable jobs for all,  ensuring fair wages and working conditions;  and setting up effective mechanisms for the economic empowerment of women and marginalized sectors  including recognizing and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples to our lands, territories and resources.  These  actions from the local, national and international levels are imperative and urgent  in advancing the SDGs in a comprehensive and integrated fashion.

Likewise,  effective mechanisms for  transparency, accountability and democratic governance  at all levels  are essential. The rise of authoritarian states and shrinking democratic space, as well as widespread and entrenched corruption are  resulting to widespread human rights violations with impunity and seriously undermining the effective participation of civil society in decision making; aggravating poverty and lack  social services. Governments need to establish effective  mechanisms and enabling environment  for citizens participation, especially  by the rights-holders and marginalized sectors  in decision making  participatory monitoring mechanisms to track progress, disaggregate data to identify disparities and  to take corrective actions. Likewise, transparency and accountability in resource allocation and implementation are needed  to ensure that no one is left behind.

Additionally, there is a need for urgent and  concerted actions  to environmental sustainability in the implementation of the SDGs. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation are pressing issues  as a result of systemic challenges.  Unless we transform the  orientation of  unsustainable  economic growth based on resource extraction and labor exploitation,  re-orient the  just transition to  human rights protection and social equity; and recognize and support the roles and contributions of indigenous peoples in the conservation of our environment, and support the initiatives and actions of marginalized sectors for climate mitigation and adaptation in building their resilience, the global climate crisis will only worsen.

Lastly, international cooperation based on social justice and equity  are vital in addressing the gaps in achieving the SDGs. It is crucial for developed countries to fulfill their commitments on Official Development Assistance (ODA) and debt relief, and  to share technologies and resources to benefit and uplift the condition of the poor and marginalized.

Addressing systemic barriers to advance sustainable development requires  comprehensive actions at all levels.  This involves implementing and enforcing national laws that protect against discrimination, supporting affirmative action programs, and promoting inclusive policies  that address the specific needs and concerns of marginalized groups and   transforming the unsustainable and inequitable economic system. Actions to empower marginalized communities and  women by protecting their rights  and  their effective participation in decision-making under democratic governance, mobilizing  adequate  financial resources and putting in place effective measures against corruption are all needed now.

In conclusion, we must prioritize measures to advance  social justice and equity to advance the SDGS. This requires addressing the persistent inequality, integrating human rights principles,  ensuring environmental sustainability,  accountability, effective participation and democratic governance, and action-oriented collaboration. By taking these actions, we can create a more just and inclusive world, leaving no one behind and saving our planet.