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High-level segment

**High-level political forum on sustainable development,
convened under the auspices of the Economic and
Social Council**

Letter dated 23 December 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Guyana to the United Nations addressed to the President of the 2021 session of the Economic and Social Council

I write on behalf of the Group of 77 and China in follow-up to draft decision [E/2021/L.8/Rev.1](#), submitted by the Group for consideration by the Economic and Social Council.

The Group would like to thank you for your efforts to address this matter, recalling several months of consultations with your office that were rooted in our deep interest in ensuring the adoption of a ministerial declaration for the Council's 2020 high-level segment and high-level political forum on sustainable development. We are also conscious of the fact that the matter was a carry-over from the Council's 2020 session. However, we are deeply disappointed that the matter was not treated by all Member States with the required level of urgency and interest in engagement that the Group of 77 and China accorded to it.

As has been intimated by our Group on multiple occasions since July 2020, the adoption of a ministerial declaration for the 2020 high-level political forum at this most challenging juncture, and at the start of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, would send a positive and clear signal to the peoples of the world about our firm commitment to prioritizing the development agenda of the United Nations and implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in spite of the challenges and difficulties caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Therefore, the Group of 77 and China is greatly concerned that it was involuntarily placed in the position of being unable to take action on the draft ministerial declaration for which it had been a negotiating party, despite its most ardent and collective efforts to correct this unfortunate anomaly.

The Group recalls your own reasoned comments on the integrity of the Council and the high-level political forum process and reiterates its rejection of the flawed procedure that was followed in the placement under silence procedure of a draft



declaration that had been unilaterally amended. The Group is greatly concerned that the established practices and conventions that have governed the negotiating process of the high-level political forum were not abided by, which severely compromised the credibility of the process despite the co-facilitators' best efforts to transmit a draft that had attained near-consensus. We call for greater openness and transparency in the conduct of such processes and invite all partners to resist attempts to interfere with the integrity of the process. We will continue to expend our best efforts to safeguard the inclusive, multilateral and transparent nature of the high-level political forum.

As we look ahead to preparations for the 2021 high-level political forum, the Group wishes to reflect on the final version of the draft 2020 ministerial declaration submitted to the Council presidency by the co-facilitators at the conclusion of the negotiations. The Group is of the view that the co-facilitators had succeeded in striking a fair balance of the positions expressed by delegations and we remain satisfied that many of our priorities were reflected in the draft. It would be prudent for the co-facilitators who are appointed by you for the 2021 declaration to pay keen attention to the agreed elements contained in the 2020 draft declaration and to make every effort to build on that consensus. In the same vein, I take this opportunity to recall our letter of 21 July 2020 (see annex), which, inter alia, outlined the substantive issues on which the Group broke silence. The Group believes that it is of equal importance for the co-facilitators of the 2021 declaration to take careful note of the Group's position on these issues so as to avoid the difficulties that were unnecessarily created during the 2020 negotiations.

In view of these considerations and to safeguard the coherence and integrity of the high-level political forum, the Group wishes to forego consideration of draft decision [E/2021/L.8/Rev.1](#). We regret that our efforts to adopt a 2020 ministerial declaration have been opposed by some Member States on the pretext of procedural issues and underscore that our strong preference was to provide the membership with the opportunity to do so. The Group commits to its characteristic, constructive and cooperative spirit for the 2021 high-level political forum negotiations and will work with all delegations to craft a robust declaration that gives strong policy guidance and mobilizes support to countries as they accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, while simultaneously attempting to build back better from the multidimensional impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the above, and to avoid similar deadlock in the future, the Group stresses the need to take all the measures necessary to ensure that action can be taken on the draft declarations of the high-level political forum as soon as the situation permits, should extraordinary circumstances prevent the Council from convening to do so, as was the case in 2020.

The Group kindly requests that the present letter, together with its annex, be circulated to the membership of the high-level political forum for information and issued as a document of the Economic and Social Council.

(Signed) Carolyn **Rodrigues-Birkett**
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Guyana to the United Nations
Chair of the Group of 77

Annex to the letter dated 23 December 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Guyana to the United Nations addressed to the President of the 2021 session of the Economic and Social Council

Letter dated 21 July 2020 from the Representative of Guyana to the United Nations addressed to the President of the 2020 session of the Economic and Social Council

I write on behalf of the Group of 77 and China in response to your letter of 17 July 2020 circulating the draft ministerial declaration of the 2020 high-level political forum ([E/2020/L.20-E/HLPF/2020/L.1](#)).

I would first like to convey the Group's position regarding the procedure that was followed for circulating the draft. Please recall the consultations that we had prior to the circulation of the draft, when the idea of circulating the draft without including paragraph 12 was proposed. At that time, I expressed the need to allow time for adequate consultations, even if it meant deferring action on the draft to a later date. Alternatively, I had suggested that, should the presidency proceed with circulating the text, paragraph 12 as drafted by the co-facilitators must be included, as this is a redline for our Group.

It is highly unacceptable, therefore, that the draft was nonetheless circulated with an altered paragraph 12 that did not include the reference to "peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation", even though this reference was present in the co-facilitators' draft submitted to the presidency. The Group strongly objects to this flawed procedure, as it is not the usual practice to modify the co-facilitators' text prepared on the basis of negotiations among Member States. Further, the Group is greatly disturbed by the decision to ignore its concerns, which were conveyed to the presidency both in conversation and in my letter of 17 July. I reiterate that dialogue and mutual respect are fundamental tenets of multilateralism, and those who are charged with the stewardship of the United Nations organs are especially required to uphold these tenets in a non-partisan manner.

I will now outline below the substantive issues contained in the draft that are of concern to the Group:

Paragraph 12. The Group had been supportive of paragraph 12 as drafted by the co-facilitators and was particularly satisfied with the reference to "the self-determination of peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation", which was taken from paragraph 35 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At this juncture, when we are witnessing a grave existential threat against one of our members, it is critical for us to reaffirm our commitment to leave no one behind, including peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation. We are therefore deeply disappointed that this reference was removed from the draft circulated.

Paragraph 17: In the 29 June version of the draft circulated by the co-facilitators, the penultimate sentence read: "We reiterate our commitment to promote a universal, rules-based, open, transparent, predictable, inclusive, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization, as well as meaningful trade liberalization." This reference mirrored that contained in the consensus resolution [74/4](#) and contributed to making this paragraph very robust. The Group was therefore disappointed to see the removal of this reference in the draft circulated, which resulted in the weakening of this paragraph.

Paragraph 18. The Group of 77 and China had put forward key elements for inclusion in the paragraph on climate change that would have seen the ministerial declaration making a very strong and action-oriented statement on this critical issue.

With less than a decade left for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and with the start of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, all States Members of the United Nations must pursue urgent action to accelerate the implementation of the Agenda. Strong commitments are critical in this regard and this year's ministerial declaration is an appropriate opportunity to highlight our resolve to tackle climate change – one of the greatest challenges of our time and an existential threat to many developing countries. Over the course of our consultations on this paragraph, a consensus was emerging towards having a very action-oriented paragraph. The Group was therefore disappointed to receive the draft with a very diluted and weak paragraph on climate change.

Paragraph 19. We are disappointed that the reference to building back “greener” was retained in the draft despite our position expressed throughout the negotiations. The 2030 Agenda does not contain any reference to “greener” in the sense portrayed in this paragraph, nor is there agreement on the precise meaning of this term. The Group urges that we reject all attempts to introduce in the ministerial declaration concepts and terms that have no agreed definition and that may have unforeseen implications.

Unilateral coercive measures. The Group had proposed the inclusion of a paragraph 12 bis that was taken verbatim from paragraph 30 of the 2030 Agenda. You would agree that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has exacerbated the hardships faced by all developing countries. Unilateral coercive measures have further compounded the challenges that the pandemic has created, and countries that are bearing the weight of these measures imposed on them need our solidarity and support. It is therefore highly regrettable that our proposed paragraph was not taken into consideration even though it is based on agreed language contained in the 2030 Agenda.

On account of the issues highlighted above, the Group is breaking silence on the draft ministerial declaration circulated on 17 July.

In addition to the foregoing, the Group is recording its concerns on the following issues:

Paragraph 13. There is no multilaterally agreed definition of “nature-based solutions”. Accordingly, as a compromise, that reference in this paragraph should be balanced with a reference to “ecosystem-based approaches”.

Paragraph 24. We should also commit to enhancing North-South cooperation, in addition to South-South and triangular cooperation, in this paragraph. As the Group had proposed, this paragraph should also urge developed countries to fulfil their official development assistance commitments.

Paragraph 27. The Group finds it difficult to understand why the reference to the countries that presented voluntary national reviews was removed. There is a precedent for including this reference with the corresponding footnote listing those countries, and so the decision to remove the reference must be reconsidered.

I wish to make it clear that the Group of 77 and China is keen to see the adoption of a ministerial declaration for the 2020 high-level political forum and will not accept the setting-aside of the document. The United Nations is at a critical juncture of its existence, and with all of the developments taking place around the globe, including the new challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for us to adopt a very robust ministerial declaration that takes account of the current realities. In this context, the Group urges continued consultations on the issues on which consensus has not yet been achieved so that we could proceed with the adoption of the declaration. Should all efforts at achieving consensus be unsuccessfully

exhausted, the Group is prepared to proceed with the adoption by vote at such time that voting becomes a possibility.

Allow me to reiterate the availability and willingness of the Group of 77 and China to continue consultations with a view to finding a way forward. As always, we remain a constructive partner in the process. I wish to also take this opportunity to thank you for your leadership in the work of the Economic and Social Council for 2020 and I also thank the Bureau for its support.

(Signed) Neil **Pierre**

Ambassador of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana to the United Nations
Chair of the Group of 77
