



# **Parliaments' Role in Linking Good Security Sector Governance to SDG16 amid COVID-19**

***Webinar report***

## About the event

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This side event focused on the crucial role of parliaments in promoting the nexus between peace and sustainable development envisaged under SDG16. Through their role as one of the most prominent oversight bodies of the state, parliaments hold governments accountable for their commitments under the 2030 Agenda, and ensure that national security sectors operate within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights - thereby contributing to peace, justice and security. This oversight function is especially critical during times of crisis, as we are facing today with the challenges posed by COVID 19. Ahead of the presentation of their country's VNRs later in the day, members of Parliaments from Costa Rica, Georgia and Nepal showcased how their work contributes to realizing the good governance ambitions of SDG16 and the 2030 Agenda, and how these same principles are essential in the response to COVID 19.

**Date:** 13 July 2020

**Watch the webinar online at:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrTUK\\_g9cKQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrTUK_g9cKQ)

## Speakers

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**Ms. Nielsen Pérez Pérez**, Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Costa Rica

**Ms. Sophie Kiladze**, Parliament of Georgia

**Hon. Dr. Deepak Prakash Bhatt**, Federal Parliament of Nepal

### *Opening Remarks*

**Amb. Rodrigo A. Carazo**, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations

**Amb. Thomas Guerber**, Director, DCAF

*VNRs Analysis Findings:* **Ms. Alexandra Preperier**, Research Assistant, DCAF

*Moderator:* **Dr. Hans Born**, Head of the Policy and Research Division, DCAF

## Co-sponsors and support

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This side event was hosted by Costa Rica and DCAF. It is co-sponsored by Georgia and Nepal. It was also co-sponsored and made possible by the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.



## **Sustainable Development Goals**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address seventeen global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change and environmental degradation. SDG16, which pertains to peace and justice, has the stated objective 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 goal is further divided into 12 sub-objectives, also known as “targets”. These twelve targets of SDG16 provide more concrete direction for states for a vision of what are peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The specific targets can be seen in the icons dispersed throughout this report. In addition, each of these targets also has several indicators by which one can measure implementation of the Target, and therefore SDG16.

## **About the HLPF**

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is the global hub for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. Held annually, it brings together national government representatives, international organizations, civil society and private sector actors, thus representing an important platform to provide political leadership and to share lessons learnt, best practices and guidance for the realization of the SDGs. The main theme of this year’s HLPF is “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

## **Linkage between Security Sector Governance and SDG16**

The 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development highlights the relationship between peace and sustainable development. SDG16 acknowledges security as an enabler of development and that good governance principles are imperative for the achievement of this goal. It aims to promote peaceful, just, and inclusive societies by building effective and accountable institutions most notably through target 16.6, which seeks to strengthen good governance and accountability of public institutions. To achieve SDG16, all states will need

to redouble their efforts to ensure that security and justice are delivered in an effective, accountable and transparent manner.

### Key takeaways from the webinar

TARGET 16-1



REDUCE VIOLENCE EVERYWHERE

The first and second target of SDG16 concern the right to physical and psychological safety and security of everyone to live their lives free from violence and abuse, in particular children. In order to contribute to these targets, MPs can, amongst others, pass laws that seek to reduce violent crime or on the rights of children to protect them from abuse and mistreatment. These laws can create new mechanisms to protect children, such as help lines for people to receive advice and suggestions to access various available services.

TARGET 16-2



PROTECT CHILDREN FROM ABUSE, EXPLOITATION, TRAFFICKING AND VIOLENCE

In Georgia, the parliament recently adopted a code on the rights of the child, and recently launched a new helpline, which has already provided support to hundreds of children.

TARGET 16-3



PROMOTE THE RULE OF LAW AND ENSURE EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE

By passing laws and adjusting them to offer best protection, MPs also contribute to target 16.3 on the rule of law and access to justice. MPs are the arbiters of rule of law. By creating and passing legislation, they create the body of law governing the public. As a result, MPs have considerable influence in promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice.

The Parliaments of Costa Rica, Georgia and Nepal have all enacted laws which seek to create peaceful, just and inclusive societies. In addition, the parliaments regularly promote rule of law through their five key functions of parliament: specifically legislative, budgetary, oversight, elective and representative functions.

At the same time, the COVID 19 crisis has created new challenges which have required amendments in national legislative frameworks to permit rapid adaptation and response. For example, the National

Assembly of Costa Rica has amended regulations to shorten the approval of extraordinary budgets and to meet virtually. It has also enabled reforms of labour laws to avoid layoffs, extensions of tax payments, and a strengthening of mechanisms for the monitoring and control of public resources. These measures taken by parliament will strengthen the capacities of institutions to deliver necessary services to the public.

These aforementioned five key functions of parliament contribute to the establishment of effective, accountable and transparent institutions, which is reflected in target 16.6. MPs can contribute to this target by enacting laws that contain strong oversight and accountability components. MPs can enhance this by regularly exercising their oversight role, as well as by holding parliamentary hearings and inquiries.

In Georgia, the Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee has developed an Action Plan that is aligned with the SDGs. This strengthens accountability by ensuring that Georgia meets its national objectives that are in line with the 2030 Agenda and other Human Rights treaties.

In Nepal, the Federal Parliament has been actively involved in developing a federalized approach to government, by establishing regional and local governance structures. Throughout this process, parliament has been involved in ensuring that budgetary expenditures have been in line with those forecasted at the beginning of the fiscal year.

In Costa Rica, the National Assembly was involved in developing a national plan to implement the SDGs, which included participation from all sectors of society. Parliament remains involved in monitoring Costa Rica's progress in fulfilling its objectives.

Accountability and transparency of public institutions have also been essential in the response to the challenges posed by COVID-19. MPs highlighted that they actively continued their oversight function in the



context of the crisis, for example through committee hearings and parliamentary sessions. In particular, the Georgian parliament has held a significant number of extraordinary sessions due to the pandemic, which underscores the active role that the legislative power has been exerting in ensuring government accountability in the midst of the crisis.

TARGET 16-7



ENSURE RESPONSIVE, INCLUSIVE AND REPRESENTATIVE DECISION-MAKING

Parliaments are one of the most prominent decision-making bodies in society. However, they can only fulfill their responsibilities with regard to their key functions if they are responsive, inclusive and representative of their constituents, by whom they are elected.

In Costa Rica, the National Assembly is quite gender inclusive. Women constitute 46% of all MPs, which is one of the highest percentages in the world. It also has a high number of young people in elected positions. However, MPs need to continue to strive to create more inclusive societies, as COVID-19 has exposed significant structural inequalities. Those already most disadvantaged in society, such as those in poverty and ethnic or racial minorities have been more adversely impacted by the pandemic. The pandemic has shown that as a society we should explore how to create a new social contract, one which is more inclusive and leaves no one behind, which is a key objective of the 2030 Agenda.

TARGET 16-B



PROMOTE AND ENFORCE NON-DISCRIMINATORY LAWS AND POLICIES

As noted earlier, Nepal is currently transitioning to a federalist style of government, which will in itself create more responsive, inclusive and representative decision-making, by endowing local authorities with more power in how they govern themselves. MPs have sought advice from a broad array of stakeholders, such as businesses, civil society and academics, in this transition process.

In Georgia, Parliament has actively sought to develop laws and policies that are inclusive and serve some of the most vulnerable segments of society. As mentioned earlier, the Parliament adopted

additional protections on the human rights of children, and will soon implement similar assistance to persons struggling with substance abuse and addiction, to ensure that government provides support to all persons.

One of the main threats to targets 16.6 and 16.7 and to sustainable development as a whole is corruption. Parliament is endowed with the authority to permit government spending. Therefore, parliament has an important role in reducing corruption and bribery. Parliament can reduce corruption through effective budgeting procedures and continued and regular financial control of government to ensure public funds are not being used inappropriately.

MPs from Costa Rica, Georgia and Nepal all acknowledged this critical oversight role, especially in the context of the emergency response to COVID-19. Huge amounts of public funds have been used to provide economic relief to businesses and individuals through various government ministries. MPs in Costa Rica, Georgia and Nepal all noted how they have regularly held parliamentary hearings and committee meetings to ensure that funding has been used responsibly.

In order to tackle corruption and contribute to effective, accountable and transparent institutions access to public information, highlighted in target 16.10, is vital. MPs can ensure that the public can access information by passing laws that enshrine this right. They may also ensure that all documents pertaining to their work are made publicly accessible, and that parliamentary sessions are broadcasted.

In Georgia, the Parliament broadcasts all parliamentary sessions so that the public can observe and be better informed of parliament's activities.



## VNRs and SSG/R

An initial analysis by DCAF of two thirds of all these VNRs submitted until 2019 on the linkages of SSG/R, SDG16 and parliaments yielded some interesting results. The preliminary results suggest that while only few VNRs use of the SSG/R terminology, some reviews do make reference SSR activities - although they do not explicitly label them as such. In this sense, in a number of VNRs, there seems to be an awareness of the need for reforming certain areas of national security sectors to promote sustainable development.

The majority of VNRs also acknowledge the role of security actors in the SDGs, despite them not being explicitly referred to in the Agenda. Over 70% of VNRs refer to the police or other security actors. This explicit acknowledgement reiterates the inherent link between security and development.

VNRs make also extensive reference to parliaments, with over 90% of reviews mentioning them. However, only limited attention seems to be devoted to the role of legislatures in ensuring good governance of the security sector. Greater emphasis should therefore be placed on this critical function, illustrated by the variety of efforts presented by parliamentarians from Costa Rica, Georgia and Nepal.

MPs from Georgia and Nepal have also underscored the importance of governance and accountability in the VNRs. This highlights the key potential of parliaments to ensure that governments uphold their commitments for sustainable development. To this respect, Costa Rica's VNRs are produced in the context of the country's National Pact for the SDGs which monitors the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This national agreement also highlights the need for partnerships and inclusivity for the realization of the SDGs, as it is the result of a multi-stakeholder agreement which brings together the government, the

### What are the VNRs?

The voluntary national reviews (VNRs) aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to mobilize cooperation and support. 158 VNRs were submitted until 2019, and 47 additional reviews were presented at the 2020 HLPF.



parliament, the judicial power, local governments, the private sector, civil society and religious organisations.

## **About DCAF**

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DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance is dedicated to making states and people safer through more effective and accountable security and justice. Since 2000, the Centre has facilitated, driven and shaped security sector reform (SSR) policy and programming around the world.

Good security sector governance (SSG), based on the rule of law and respect for human rights, is a cornerstone of development and security. DCAF assists partner states in developing laws, institutions, policies and practices to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms based on international norms and good practices. In everything we do, DCAF adheres to the principles of impartiality, local ownership, inclusive participation and gender equality. DCAF also advises governments and international organizations in designing and implementing their own programmes for supporting states in developing their security sector governance.

## **About the SSG/R & SDG16 Project**

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SDG16 aims to develop peaceful and just societies by building strong institutions, through targets 16.6 and 16.7, which focus on good governance and accountability of public institutions. To achieve the ambitions envisaged under this goal, all states will need to redouble their efforts to ensure that their national security sector is both effective and accountable, and operates within a framework of democratic civilian oversight, rule of law and respect of human rights. However, there is currently limited guidance on how SSG/R policies can contribute to achieving SDG16, and in particular targets 16.6 and 16.7 which are crucial for legitimate stability, especially in fragile contexts.

This project focuses on three different oversight actors of the security sector and covers the role of parliaments, civil society and independent oversight institutions in promoting SSG/R and SDG16. Best practices and lessons learnt from Eastern Europe, the Middle East

and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and beyond, are examined and discussed with the aim to provide SDG16-specific guidance that supports states in implementing SSR in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

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