

Item 10. Pathways to accelerate progress in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its contribution towards gender equality halfway to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Biographies of moderator and panellists

Moderator: Ms. Belén Sanz Luque, UN Women Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia



A national of Spain, Ms. Belén Sanz has more than 20 years of experience in development policies, with a focus on gender equality and women's rights. Prior to joining UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, Belén Sanz served as UN Women Representative in Mexico (2017-2024), where she led flagship initiatives to advance gender equality in partnership with Mexico, such as the historic Generation Equality Forum, the Global Alliance for Care, and the Spotlight Initiative to end femicide. Between 2013 and 2017, Belén Sanz served as UN Women

Representative in Colombia, where she accompanied the historic peace process in Colombia, supporting women's participation and promoting a gender-sensitive approach to peacebuilding. From February to August 2016, she was the Resident Coordinator a.i. of the United Nations System in Colombia.

Before her role with UN Women Colombia, Belén Sanz served as the First Evaluation Director at UNIFEM and later UN Women, based at the organization's headquarters in New York. Her responsibilities included evaluating policies and programs and developing strategies in various regions, including consolidating evaluation as a strategic function for accountability, learning, and evidence-based policy-making. In addition to this, she was the

Chair of the United Nations Evaluation Group, promoting a human rights and gender approach in the UN system evaluation, earning her numerous awards. Prior to joining the United Nations, she was Head of Development Policy Evaluation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain, where she led the development of the Evaluation System for Spanish cooperation and previously served as an Advisor on gender programs and policies.

Belén Sanz holds two Master's degrees: one in Anthropology from the University of London and another in Public Policy Evaluation from the Complutense University of Madrid. She graduated in Social Anthropology from the National School of Anthropology and History in Mexico. She has also served as a speaker and lecturer at various academic institutions and international forums focusing on international cooperation, public policy evaluation, human rights and gender equality policies.

Panellists:

Dr. Geeta Rao Gupta, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, U.S. Department of State.



Ambassador Geeta Rao Gupta is the fourth Ambassador-at-Large for the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues at the U.S. Department of State and the first woman of color to hold the position. She previously served as Senior Fellow at the United Nations Foundation and Senior Advisor to Co-impact, a global collaborative philanthropy for systems change. From 2012 to 2016, Ambassador Rao Gupta served as Deputy Executive Director, Programmes at UNICEF and prior to that as a Senior Fellow at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Earlier, Gupta served as President of the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) for more than a decade. Ambassador Rao Gupta has also chaired numerous boards including the Global Advisory Board of Women Lift Health, an initiative to promote women's leadership in global health and served as a member of WHO's

BEIJING
+30 

Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for Health Emergencies, the Board of UBS Optimus Foundation and the Advisory Board of Merck for Mothers. She also served as a Commissioner for the Lancet-SIGHT Commission on Health, Gender Equality and Peace. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including InterAction's Julia Taft Award for Outstanding Leadership, Harvard University's Anne Roe Award and Washington Business Journal's "Women Who Mean Business" Award. Ambassador Rao Gupta holds a Ph.D. in Psychology from Bangalore University and an M.Phil. and M.A. from the University of Delhi in India.

**Ms. Sidsel Bleken, Ambassador for Women's Rights and Gender Equality,
Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**



Ms. Sidsel Bleken is a seasoned Norwegian diplomat currently serving as the Ambassador for Women's Rights and Gender Equality at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a role she has held since 2020. Prior to this, she was the Ambassador to Dhaka, Bangladesh, from 2016 to 2020. From 2012 to 2016, she served as a Department Director in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Before that, she was a Senior Adviser in the Ministry from 2011 to 2012. Her earlier diplomatic experience includes serving as a Counselor at the Embassy in

Warsaw from 2006 to 2011. Ms. Bleken has been associated with the foreign service since 1999 and holds a cand.mag. degree. Her extensive experience and dedication to promoting gender equality and women's rights highlight her commitment to advancing important global issues.

Dr. Kire Ilioski, Ambassador and Director for Multilateral Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of the Republic of North Macedonia



Ambassador Kire Ilioski currently leads the Directorate for Multilateral Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of the Republic of North Macedonia. Prior to this appointment, he served as Special Adviser to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia.

A notable highlight of Ambassador Ilioski's distinguished diplomatic career was his role as Director and Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), a position he held from January 1, 2020, until March 2021. Previously, starting on July 1, 2019, he served as Director in the Office of the UNECE Executive

Secretary in Geneva.

From February 2014 to 2018, H.E. Ilioski served as the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Macedonia to the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and other international organizations based in Vienna. He was the first Macedonian Governor representing the Eastern European group on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors, from October 2014 to September 2016.

In earlier roles, he served as Director for International Law at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia. In January 2011, he was appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Kingdom of Sweden and the Republic of Finland.

Ambassador Ilioski also held the position of Head of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Macedonia to NATO in Brussels, where he served as Macedonian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary from April 2008 to 2011.

Due to his expertise in regional affairs, he was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary and served as Acting Ambassador at the Macedonian Embassy in Belgrade, Serbia, from 2007 to 2008. During his tenure in Belgrade,

**BEIJING
+30**

he also acted as Minister Plenipotentiary and Acting Ambassador to the State of Israel.

From 2005 to 2007, Ambassador Ilioski held the position of Minister-Councilor and Acting Ambassador at the Embassy of the Republic of Macedonia in Budapest, Hungary, while concurrently working to develop bilateral relations with Malaysia and Indonesia.

As a career diplomat, Ambassador Ilioski has engaged with multilateral issues at various points throughout his career. His past positions include Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department for NATO, Political and Security Cooperation; Head of the Department for Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and Partnership for Peace (PFP); Head of the Department for Regional Initiatives and Security; and Head of the Department for Security of Classified Information. He has also served as Deputy Head of the Minister's Office.

Ambassador Ilioski holds a Doctorate in Political Science, with a dissertation focused on the political impacts of the EU financial crisis on Member States, providing relevant analyses and future prospects. He also holds a Master's degree in International Law and Diplomacy.

In 1994, he graduated from the Faculty of Security Studies at Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, the only academic institution offering security studies in the former Yugoslavia at that time.

Ambassador Ilioski is a graduate of the George C. Marshall Center's College of International and Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, and the NATO Defense College in Rome, Italy. He has received further training in security, international relations, and foreign affairs from various institutions across Europe, the Middle East, the USA, and Africa.

He currently serves as a visiting professor at the Geneva School of Diplomacy in Switzerland.

Ms. Florence Bauer, Regional Director, UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Ms. Florence Bauer is UNFPA's Regional Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, appointed in July 2022. Throughout her 30-year career, Ms. Bauer has been a strong advocate for positioning children's and women's rights on the political agenda and for promoting innovative approaches to reduce inequalities. She has spearheaded programmes focusing on early childhood development; mother, child, and adolescent health and mental

health; the prevention of domestic and community violence; and sexuality education for the prevention of early pregnancy and social protection.

Ms. Bauer was previously with UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, where she held senior positions advocating for children's rights in complex political contexts, most recently as UNICEF Representative in Brazil (2017-2022), Argentina (2014-2017) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2009-2014). Previous assignments also included work for civil society and the private sector.

Ms. Bauer holds a postgraduate diploma in Public Policy Studies from the University of London, as well as a Master's in Business Administration with a specialization in International Relations from the École des Hautes Études Commerciales du Nord in Lille, France.

Mr. Mark Cassayre, IDLO Permanent Observer to the United Nations in Geneva

Mr. Mark Cassayre presented his credentials to the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and assumed his duties as the Permanent Observer of the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva on April 1, 2021. Before joining IDLO, Mr. Cassayre served for over 20 years as a career member of the United States Foreign Service, with his most recent assignment being the Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Mission in Geneva. Mr. Mark

Cassayre's other overseas assignments included tours as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Maputo, Mozambique, and positions in Nairobi, Kenya; Kyiv, Ukraine; Windhoek, Namibia; and Geneva, Switzerland. Domestically, Mr. Cassayre served as the Director of the Office of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs in the Bureau of International Organizations of the State Department; as Senior Advisor at the Department of State's Foreign Service Institute; and as a National Security Affairs Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

Mr. Mark Cassayre has a master's degree in international relations from the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, and bachelors' degrees in political science and French from the University of California at Santa Barbara. Mr. Cassayre speaks French, Portuguese, and Ukrainian.

Ms. Carola Gunnarsson, Special Envoy for Freedom, Solidarity, and the Fight Against Violence Targeting Local Political Leaders, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)



Carola Gunnarsson is a dedicated member of the Swedish Centre Party and currently serves as a Councillor of Sala Municipality, a position she has held since 2002, with a previous term from 1982 to 1991. She is also the Vice President of UCLG, Special Envoy for Freedom, Solidarity, and Fighting Violence against Political Leaders, and the International Spokesperson for CEMR. Her past roles include President of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) in 2022, Vice President of SALAR from 2007 to 2011 and again from 2019 to 2022, and a member of its Board and Executive Committee from 2007 to 2023. Carola studied Political Science and Management at the University of Stockholm. She lives in the

countryside of Sala, about 120 kilometers northwest of Stockholm, where she co-owns a 170-hectare farm with her brother and sister-in-law, growing cereals and hay. Additionally, she is the Chairperson of the Swedish Handicraft organization in the county of Västmanland.