



Summit of the Future
Civil Society Organization Engagement
ECOSOC Chamber, UN Headquarters, New York Virtually
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I am pleased to make this intervention on behalf of the Centre for Health Science and Law. To steer us closer to achieving the sustainable development goals, please consider the following.

Full and equitable realization of all human rights should be measured by equitable optimization of healthy life expectancy, which now ranges from national averages of 44 years to 74 years and typically varies internally, reflecting internal social inequality. Deprivation, poor health and premature death prevent people everywhere from enjoying material and dignitary human rights, stoke tensions leading to armed conflict. Consider the following:

1. Adopt a Code-of-Conduct for engaging with civil society urged by 420 mainly ECOSOC-accredited NGOs calling for conflict-of-interest safeguards, ensuring access to information, a UN lobbying registry, and access to so many UN negotiations secreted from public view. NGOs need more tools to ensure that UN and government institutions are accountable for SDG promises they make in New York and capitals.

See: <http://tinyurl.com/UNConduct>

These are important elements of access to justice already implemented by many governments nationally.

2. Ensure the primacy of the right to health and other fundamental human rights. For instance, if the right to health (Action 31) had prevailed over the contractual and trade treaty intellectual property rights (Action 32) of pharmaceutical companies, millions of COVID-19 deaths might have been prevented. That pandemic led to nearly as many excess deaths per year ([7.5 million/year](#)) from 2020-2022 as World War II (10 million/year).

3. Specifically mandate relatable consumer warning labels about the SDG impact of privately traded products and services, especially food, alcohol, tobacco, fossil fuels and the machines they power, the true costs of which comprise half of the global *commercial* economy (Actions 10, 53 and 54). Of the [US\\$101 trillion global economy](#), people spend:

- [\\$10 trillion on food, including breastmilk substitutes,](#)
- [\\$1 trillion on tobacco,](#)
- [\\$1 trillion on fossil fuels,](#)
- [\\$1.5 trillion on gas/diesel passenger cars,](#) and
- more on furnaces, cooking equipment, and other machines powered by fossil fuels.

More consideration should be given to optimizing productivity of nutrition-sensitive and climate-resilient agriculture. Societies cannot truly thrive if the majority of their human resources are devoted to subsistence farming, with too little resources available for meeting health care, education and other sustainable development goals.

Including the harms caused by many of these products more than doubles their market cost equivalent to nearly half of the global *commercial* economy, with most of the burden borne by the public sector, such as the preventable harm to human health and productivity of all industries, greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, and the largely uncalculated ravages child labour and unlivable wages. For instance:

- The International Monetary Fund estimates that the [\\$7 trillion in “explicit” and “implicit subsidies” for fossil fuels \(e.g., responding to pollution and greenhouse gas emissions\)](#) is seven-fold higher than market prices;
- The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that global food systems [imposed \\$12.7 trillion \(in 2020 Purchasing Power Parity dollars\) in externalized costs](#), due mainly to poor diet and greenhouse gas emissions from ruminant animals, especially cattle.
- The WHO estimates the [economic costs of tobacco to be US\\$1.4 trillion](#).
- Experts estimate the costs of [alcohol to the drinker and society at approximately US\\$2.6 trillion](#).

Consumer labelling should reflect companies’ general legal duty to warn and could help shift purchases toward sustainable options and national economic performance should be measured using true cost accounting (Action 54). Measuring and reporting such information in meaningful ways at the point-of-sale should help populations better steer toward the SDGs.

We cannot indulge years of private sector resistance, casting doubt on research, quibbling over warning language, or offering to tell the good news about alternatives, but not the bad news.

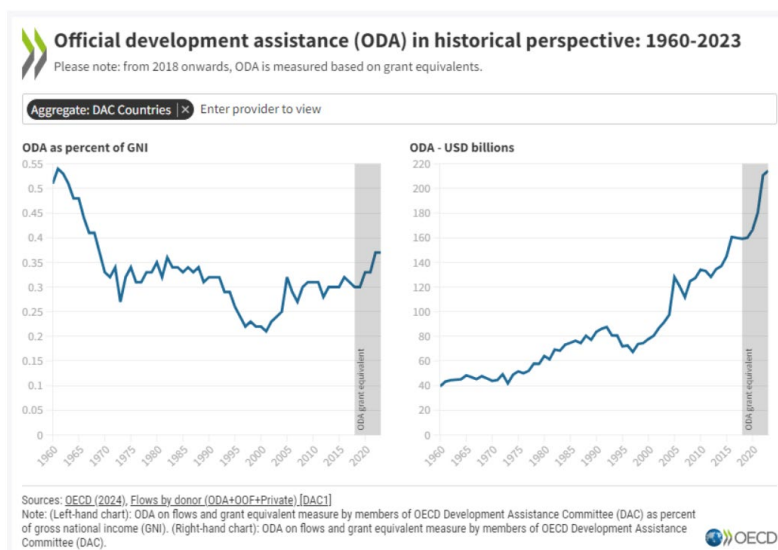
Much is already known by independent experts about the adverse impact of these products, but it is generally not communicated to consumers and is disputed by louder, misleading messages perpetuated by merchants with vested interests.

Consumption patterns must change before it is too late to cool the planet without catastrophic consequences and before human ill-health fetters development and squanders public social protection resources, human rights, and workforce productivity anymore than it already has.

4. Action item 4 (para 20(c)) urges raising Official Development Assistance to 0.7% of Gross National Income, reviving a 1969 recommendation of former Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson’s [United Nations Commission proposal](#).

That Commission’s goal would have been almost within reach for OECD countries if it had been pursued a decade earlier when ODA was nearly 0.6% of Gross National Income in OECD countries; instead, it fell by nearly half and remained so low for half a century, even lower than the notoriously austere Reagan/Thatcher administrations in the United States and United Kingdom and even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many high income countries nearly doubled their national budgets to protect their own citizens, but [Official Development Assistance rose only by only 0.05% of GNI](#) of OECD countries:



5. Financially support civil society SDG advocacy for on-going and formal annual evaluation and accountability for SDG progress, appointed at arm's length with security of tenure until 2030. Governments and UN institutions should promote more frequent, independently funded fact-checkers from tenured academics and civil society organization to report to Parliament on national and global SDG progress. Reports should be ongoing and formalized at least annually. Waiting for mid-term reviews in 15-year missions to tackle existential crises of our time indulges procrastination and dampens accountability. Truly independent advocacy organizations are often starved for funds and lose their impartiality if they turn to discretionary grants from the private sector or governments that they are duty-bound to hold to account. Government should commit to provide funding to support the work of a number of independent experts in proportion to their population (e.g., one expert per million population), appointed as officers of Parliament or funded by other arm's length transparent means to enjoy security of tenure until 2030 and be selected for their demonstrated expertise in the 17 applicable SDGs.

Respectfully submitted,

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