

[Blog](#)

[Social Justice](#)



United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed speaks July 16, 2026, during the U.N.'s High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York. (UN Photo/Loey Felipe)



by Chris Herlinger

[View Author Profile](#)

cherlinger@ncronline.org

[Join the Conversation](#)

July 27, 2026

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Progress in achieving the United Nations' ambitious [sustainable development goals](#) to eliminate poverty, hunger and other social ills by 2030 remains fragile, say U.N. officials, Catholic sisters and congregational lay representatives who recently attended an annual review of the global targets.

But the U.N.'s High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, held July 7-15 at the United Nations in New York, also showed some signs of hope, they say.

Among them is the fact that some countries and even local municipalities are paying more attention to the sustainable development goals, which were initiated in 2015. Those government bodies are also focused more on "peer learning," in which they share ways the goals can be achieved, said [Sr. Veronica Brand](#), who represents the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary at the U.N.

While the news from the forum was decidedly mixed, Brand took heart that, at the local level, many government bodies are now taking the goals seriously. Municipalities in Brazil and even in large U.S. cities, such as New York and Los Angeles, are examples "of where energy is being put into reviewing their performance on the SDGs."

Such learnings are important and could have a lasting effect beyond the year 2030, Brand told GSR. But while public commitments to the goals by U.N.-member countries remain strong, Brand said continued challenges include the lack of political will or action to achieve the goals, as well as insufficient funding.

In remarks delivered July 16 at the forum, Deputy U.N. Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, a Nigerian diplomat, spoke similarly, saying, "The foundations of this past decade were hard-won. The next five years are for delivering on the promise of the SDGs and building the foundations of the future."

Advertisement

Among the goals with a focus this year were those on water and sanitation; energy; resilient infrastructure; and making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

While progress has been made in some areas, Brand noted that one continuing challenge is the overall reduction of global development aid.

Such assistance fell by 23.1% between 2024 and 2025, UN News [reported](#) July 16. That drop was "largely due to falling aid by the US, UK, Germany, France and Japan," according to U.N. data.

"That's a shocking figure," Brand said, adding that compounding the situation is the attendant rise in military expenditures due to the U.S.- and Israeli-led war in Iran.

At the conclusion of the forum, U.N.-member states adopted a declaration committing them to reforms they hope will close a \$4 trillion SDG financing gap, UN News reported.

In a related finding, five U.N. agencies said in a report issued July 21 that global hunger declined in 2025 for the third consecutive year, UN News reported. However, the news agency said that the gains shown in the report "remain fragile and [are] far too slow to achieve" the goal of eliminating global hunger by 2030.

"Despite sustained, gradual improvement in recent years, global hunger and food insecurity remain far above the targets set by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," said the U.N.'s "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2026," with the U.N. agencies saying that 645 million people experienced hunger in 2025.



Beth Blissman, the Loretto Community's representative at the United Nations, third from left, back row, helped organize an 11-member intergenerational delegation during the recent meetings of the U.N.'s High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York. (Courtesy of Loretto Community.)

Beth Blissman, the Loretto Community's representative at the U.N., took note of such realities by saying that "we need to rethink how we define economics" — and create systems that are more sustainable for the entire planet.

"The people of the world want peace, not war," Blissman told GSR, noting the uptick in global military spending. She added that the Loretto community believes it is important for U.S. citizens "to look beyond our borders."

That is one reason her office organized an 11-member intergenerational delegation from ages 15 to 65 to the recent U.N. meetings.

Blissman said that with U.S. aid cuts to development funding and even to the United Nations itself, members of the Loretto delegation "were impressed by how seriously

countries other than the U.S. are taking the SDGs and that the United Nations remains a place governments can work collaboratively together."

UISG delegation meets Queen Camilla in London

Less than a year after meeting King Charles and Queen Camilla during a state visit to the Vatican in October 2025, sisters representing the International Union of Superiors General, or UISG, met with the queen earlier this month at the royal residence in London.

The July 15 gathering at Clarence House was an opportunity for sisters to update the queen on "the impact of their work over the past year, with a particular focus on advancing dignity, protection and opportunity for vulnerable women and girls," UISG said in a statement, including initiatives on climate justice and [anti-human trafficking efforts](#).

"This renewed exchange underlined the strong alignment between the mission of Catholic Sisters and Her Majesty's longstanding commitment to supporting women and girls," the statement said. "Across continents, Sisters are often a first line of response — trusted, embedded, and able to respond to the most vulnerable in contexts where others cannot."



Queen Camilla meets sisters representing the International Union of Superiors General during a July 15 audience at Clarence House in London. From left: Sr. Lynne Baron, Sr. Maamalifar Poreku, Sr. Abby Avelino, the queen, Sr. Roxanne Schares and Anabel Inge. (Courtesy of Buckingham Palace)

The audience was attended by [Sr. Roxanne Schares](#), a School Sister of Notre Dame who is UISG's executive secretary; Maryknoll [Sr. Abby Avelino](#), the international coordinator of the anti-trafficking ministry Talitha Kum; and Sr. Maamalifar Poreku, a Missionary Sister of Our Lady of Africa and the co-executive secretary of the UISG-USG Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

Also attending were Sr. Lynne Baron, area leader of the Faithful Companions of Jesus in Britain and the Archbishop's Delegate for Catholic Social Action, Liverpool Archdiocese, and Anabel Inge, the Charge' d'Affaires ad interim, British Embassy to the Holy See in Rome.

Inge said that the work of Catholic sisters "demonstrates the power of trust, presence and long-term commitment in helping vulnerable communities thrive."

The meeting with the queen "was a valuable opportunity to recognize the extraordinary contribution sisters make around the world, particularly in supporting women and girls affected by poverty, conflict, displacement and exploitation."

Talitha Kum to release annual report during webinar

The sister-led anti-trafficking coalition Talitha Kum will release its 2025 annual report at a webinar at 2 p.m., Rome time (8 a.m. EDT) on July 29.

The Rome-based network said the event "will bring together members of our international community, survivors, grassroots leaders and partners to reflect on a year of shared mission in the fight against human trafficking."

Sr. Nina Krapic, a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul of Zagreb who currently serves as [deputy director of the Holy See Press Office](#), will deliver the keynote address. She will be joined by Sr. Roxanne Schares, a School Sister of Notre Dame, who is the executive secretary of the International Union of Superiors General, or UISG.

Other speakers will include Maryknoll Sr. Abby Avelino, Talitha Kum's international coordinator, as well as a trafficking survivor, other sisters and a Talitha Kum youth ambassador.

The event will close with an interactive question-and-answer session, providing participants the opportunity to engage with the speakers. Simultaneous interpretation will be available in five languages: English, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and French.

Further information and a registration link can be found [here](#).