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**Keynote Speech of Dima Al-Khatib
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**“Financing Sustainable Development:
Harnessing Collective Action through South-South and triangular cooperation”**

The 27th WSBI World Congress
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Excellencies,
Distinguished speakers,
Dear partners, colleagues, and friends,

Good morning. It is an honor to address you at this significant moment, as we gather to discuss the **future of responsible financing**. Today, we also celebrate **a remarkable milestone—100 years of the World Savings and Retail Banking Institute (WSBI)**.

Over the past century, WSBI has been a cornerstone of global efforts to provide accessible financial services to millions around the world. Its leadership has been instrumental in promoting the role of savings and retail banks in supporting inclusive and sustainable economic growth. From its early beginnings to becoming the world’s oldest global banking association, WSBI has built a legacy of trust, stability, and progress that resonates with the core values of sustainable development.



As we convene today, this Congress offers us a unique opportunity to reflect on the legacy of an institution that has continually adapted to global challenges. Marking WSBI's centenary, this Congress is not only a forum to share best practices but also a springboard for innovation and strategic alliances that can accelerate our collective progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Through this dialogue, we reinforce the **importance of financial institutions in supporting inclusive growth, fostering resilience in local economies, and empowering underserved populations**. This underscores the **power of collaboration—across sectors, borders, and regions**.

I look forward to discussing how, together, we can leverage our partnerships—whether through South-South and triangular cooperation or broader multilateral engagements—to build a future where financial services truly reach and benefit all, particularly for those in emerging markets and vulnerable communities in the Global South.

In 2015 the world came together to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To date, **less than 17% of the targets set under the SDGs are on track** to being achieved globally by 2030.

This stark reality is a **call for urgent and intensified action**.

As the steward of the SDGs, the United Nations recognized from the start that achieving them would require more than just governmental action. It would demand a new level of **collaboration, innovation, and commitment from every sector** of society.

The adoption of the [Pact for the Future](#) during the recently concluded 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly represents an

important step towards a stronger and more inclusive multilateral system — one fit to address today’s global challenges and accelerate our efforts for the Sustainable Development Goals.

We now need the support of all stakeholders, including development banks and other financial institutions, to ensure that the Pact’s ambitions are translated into meaningful change on the ground.

The Pact for the Future specifically calls on **international financial institutions (IFIs) and multilateral development banks (MDBs) to reform the global financial architecture and mobilize increased financing for SDG-related projects.**

The **Global Digital Compact**, included in the Pact for the Future, commits to an inclusive, open, sustainable, fair, safe, and secure digital future for all, and underscores the importance of financing to unlock its full potential. This includes **pooling investments through joint and blended facilities for impact at scale, with facilities hosted by MDBs.**

The **financing gap remains a significant barrier to sustainable development.** To bridge this gap and make progress, especially in areas like climate mitigation and adaptation, **the world requires an estimated \$4 trillion annually—60% more than projected in 2014.**

Although **official development assistance (ODA) has reached record levels, it remains insufficient** to meet the growing demands, especially for vulnerable countries such as Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Debt distress is another pressing challenge that affects numerous countries across Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

The external debt stocks of developing countries have surged to an alarming \$11.4 trillion in 2022, more than double what they were a decade ago. **The global public debt has reached a record \$97 trillion, with developing countries accounting for nearly 30 percent of this total.** A total of **54 countries, or almost 40 percent of the developing world, are in serious debt distress**, dedicating at least 10 percent of their government funds to debt interest payments.

These are extraordinary times that demand extraordinary measures. **More concessional resources and grants, as well as innovative financing mechanisms, are needed** to support sustainable development efforts. The **Secretary General's call for an urgent SDG Stimulus** is more relevant than ever.

Development banks and financial institutions are critical in providing long-term, affordable financing for developing countries, in times of multiple crises.

By investing in sectors such as **agriculture and social protection**, they can promote inclusive growth, ensuring marginalized communities like women and rural populations have access to opportunities. They can also invest in **green infrastructure**, supporting the transition to low-carbon economies.

The **BAPA+40 Outcome Document** recognizes **the role of multilateral institutions, regional banks, and funds—particularly those led by developing countries—in supporting South-South cooperation.**

Southern development banks and regional banks can contribute significantly to **financing climate and debt-vulnerable countries** through grants, concessional financing, debt relief, and loans, complementing ODA. Southern-led multilateral and regional financial institutions could also coordinate to invest in **regional infrastructure and development projects, promoting economic integration among the Global South.**

National development banks are equally crucial for mobilizing the required financing, including from private sources, to meet countries' climate and environmental objectives. These institutions are increasingly seen as vital parts of the global financial system and essential tools for ensuring financing for sustainable development priorities.

Despite the recognition of financial institutions' role in development, the **paid-in capital of development banks has not grown in line with global economic expansion or investment needs.**

The **Addis Ababa Action Agenda** calls on **development banks to maximize their resources and evaluate their** roles to ensure they are fully equipped to support the sustainable development agenda. Recent global shocks have heightened the urgency for these institutions to reassess their roles, scale, and functions to better respond to SDG challenges.

A positive sign is that **coordination among development banks has increased significantly since the adoption of the Addis Agenda.** This includes the [statement signed by 10 MDBs](#) at the Marrakech meetings in **2023.**

Closer collaboration through South-South and triangular cooperation could further enhance the impact of development banks and financial institutions.

South-South and triangular cooperation plays a vital role in advancing SDGs, particularly in areas like **capacity building, technology transfer, innovation, trade facilitation, regional integration, climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, and data collection**. This was highlighted in recent high-level forums, including SIDS4, the South Summit, the Havana Summit, COP28, and LDC3.

UNOSSC, with its mission to promote, coordinate and support South-South and triangular cooperation globally and within the United Nations system, is expanding its partnerships with IFIs and MDBs, including the Islamic Development Bank and the OPEC Fund for International Development. Together, we aim to support the Global South by mobilizing capital, technical expertise, and partnerships necessary to achieve the SDGs, through joint advocacy, knowledge-sharing, and implementation of South-South and triangular cooperation projects.

Through **the South-South Trust Funds** that we manage, we offer support for all partners in inclusive demand driven initiatives by providing targeted funding to the most vulnerable and marginalized communities. Earlier this month, during the 8th International Meeting on Triangular Cooperation in Lisbon, UNOSSC launched the **Triangular Cooperation Window** under the United Nations Fund for South-South Cooperation. This Window aims to transform financing strategies by leveraging UN platforms and partnerships to connect Southern countries, triangular partners, and UN agencies to scale up successful development solutions.

UNOSSC is a robust knowledge hub and partner of choice in South-South and triangular cooperation capacity building. The Office has built a vast repository of knowledge on South-South and triangular cooperation, and on sustainable development financing. Our digital platform, **South-South Galaxy**, hosts **over 950 SDG-related practices from the Global South**. In

addition, our new **South-South and Triangular Cooperation Solutions Lab** is testing and incubating scalable cooperation solutions.

As we approach the **Fourth Financing for Development Forum**, we stand at a critical crossroads.

UNOSSC is committed to **collaborating with development banks and financial institutions, including WSBI members, to develop inclusive South-South and triangular financing mechanisms** that advance sustainable development goals.

Together, we can continue to build on this century of progress, ensuring that financial services reach and benefit all—especially those in the Global South—through cooperation, innovation, and shared vision.

Tangible and purposeful investments in sustainable development can help power the exponential and mutually beneficial growth needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda and beyond. We must work to unlock new investment opportunities to address common challenges if we are to achieve our internationally agreed development goals.

This Congress is an **opportunity to join efforts, to share practical, innovative, and impactful solutions** that can leverage the banks and other financial institutions' potential through South-South and triangular cooperation.

Together, we can shoulder countries' efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and **build a better future** that is prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable for all.

Thank you.

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