

**IGF closing remarks by Ms. Yanchun Zhang**  
**Special Unit on Commodities, UNCTAD**  
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Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

We have arrived at the end of the programme for the 12th Annual General Meeting of the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development. Over the past three days, we have examined and debated what is an ambitious overall theme: "the Sustainable Development Goals and Mining."

We were guided in this debate by a distinguished group of experts. In each of the sessions, panellists elaborated the topics with interventions that were insightful, well-constructed and, in some cases, even controversial. A balanced allocation of time between panellists' presentations and interactive debate allow us to different perspectives and invite us to refine our individual thinking and approaches on the complex issues we endeavour to address.

This year, we once again saw the value and the importance of the IGF as an intergovernmental forum encompassing all stakeholders along the mining and minerals value chain. The increasing numbers taking part in the forum each year and the countries that have become new members this year are a testament to the good work that the IGF is doing.

Last year's IGF's annual general meeting examined the topic of post-mining transition and environmental management, in particular focusing on best practices in overcoming a whole range of post-mining transition challenges, including environmental and social risks when closing a mine. This year, we heard similar topics debated again within the context of achieving the SDGs. We want to applaud the IGF for its continuous substantial contribution to improved understanding of these critical issues.

This year's IGF's annual general meeting is very important as it initiated discussions on an issue critical to many of our constituents, commodity dependent developing countries. That is, the confluence of the SDGs and Mining.

Agenda 2030 gives us a roadmap to ensure a future of prosperity, dignity, and a better planet, for all. The challenges ahead to achieve the SDGs are enormous and require a concerted effort: the mobilization of all sectors and all tools at our disposal. After a week's deliberation, we believe the message is clear, the mining sector creates various challenges for achieving the SDGs, but the sector also provides great opportunities for advancing the goals.

We had very exciting and productive couple of days. Hearing so much about the opportunities and challenges in the SDGs and mining, and reflecting on them, has indeed been overwhelming. We all need to sit down and digest what we heard this week. One area that strikes us as promising as well as needed to work further on is artisanal and small scale mining. To a large extent, artisanal and small scale miners remain ignored and marginalized, by policymakers, donors, and the general public.

But as a labour intensive mining process widely conducted on an informal basis, artisanal and small-scale mining is known to generate jobs, reduce poverty, and provide livelihood for millions of people compared to large-scale mining. However, the poor management of artisanal and small-scale mining could cause environmental and health concerns which threaten the advancement of the SDGs. The environmental degradations could outweigh or reverse the economic benefits. More importantly, a lasting environmental degradation caused by artisanal and small-scale mining can adversely affect not only the safety and health of miners at their workplaces, but also the entire mining community, including the life and well-being of miners and their families.

As we heard this week, in addition to environmental and health concerns, artisanal and small scale mining also relates to gender, climate change, security and human rights. For example, artisanal gold mining, which accounts for more than a quarter of the global gold supply, is estimated to release 1,000 tons of toxic mercury per year. Some 15 million gold miners, including 4.5 million women and 600,000 children, are poisoned by direct

contact with mercury. So there is a very prominent gender component when we address the complex relationship between artisanal and small-scale mining and the SDGs.

As we at UNCTAD have underscored, the role of governments in the general debate on the SDGs and mining, including the opportunities and challenges created by artisanal and small-scale mining, remains critical. Governments have to design their own development programmes, in communication and collaboration with the respective stakeholders in the sector, taking into consideration the specificities of their countries to ensure sustainable growth and development around the mining and mineral sectors.

Ladies and gentlemen,

UNCTAD is committed to strengthening our relationship with the IGF secretariat and its hosting institution - International Institute for Sustainable Development. And, we look forward to the next session of the annual general meeting in Geneva in late 2017.