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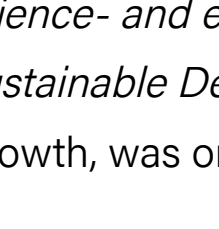
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University of Gothenburg and Partners Host Side Event on SDG 8 at the UN High-Level Political Forum

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University of Gothenburg's SDG 8 Initiative participated in the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), held at UN HQ in New York City from July 14–23. The SDG 8 Initiative led a side event, hosted by University College Dublin, that focused on how academia can support policies that promote decent work for all and sustainable economic growth.

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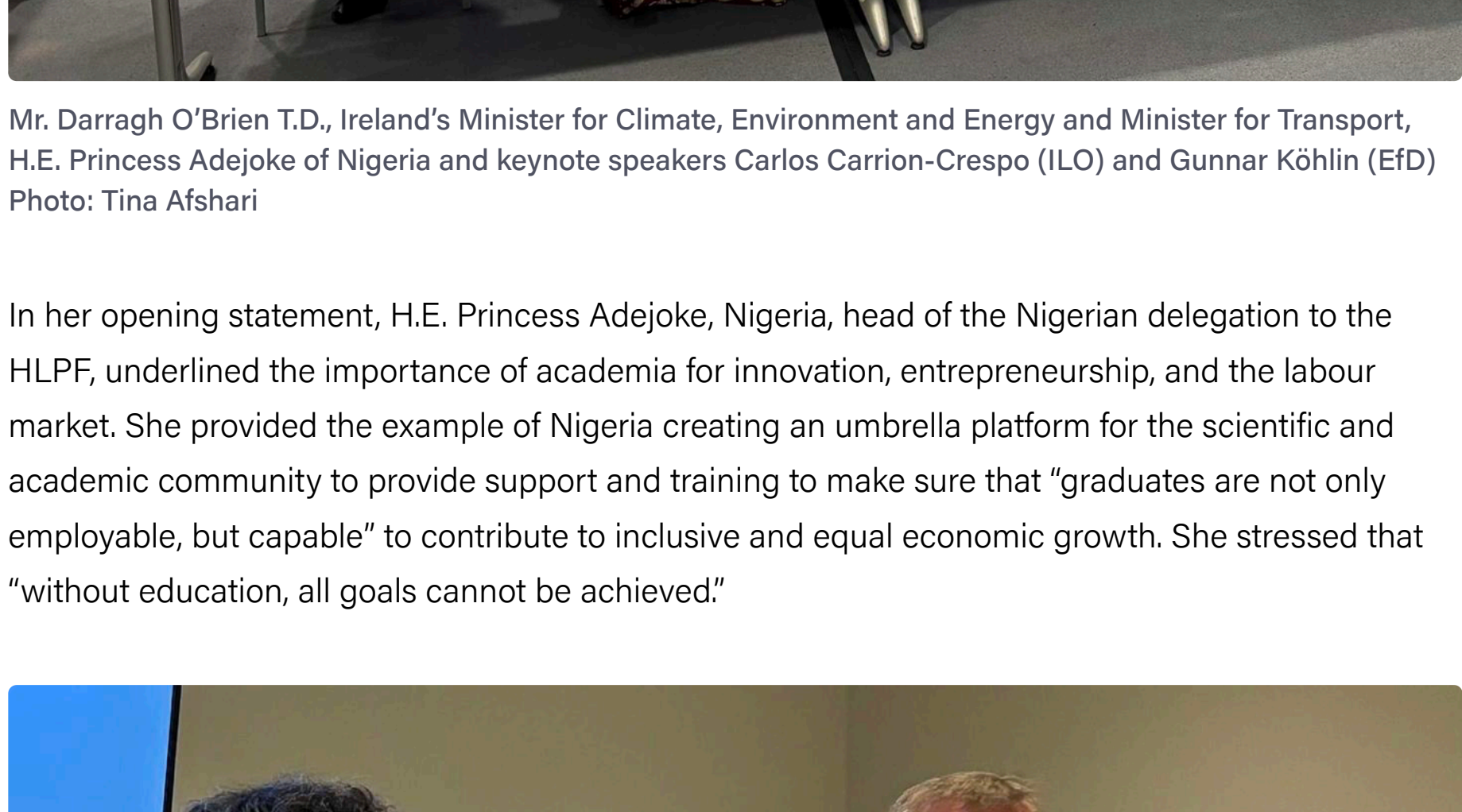
The event aligned with the overarching theme of this year's HLPF: “*Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind*.” SDG 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth, was one of five goals under in-depth review at the 2025 forum, alongside SDGs 3, 5, 14, and 17.

Co-hosted by a diverse coalition of academic and institutional partners, including the International Association of Universities (IAU), United Nations Academic Impact SDG Hub 8 at University of Auckland, International Labour Organization (ILO), UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), SDG Academy, University College Dublin, University of Nigeria Nsukka and Makerere University, the side event brought together experts and thought leaders from across the globe.

As organisers, we were delighted to welcome approximately 60 participants from a diverse group representing academia, government officials from Ireland and Nigeria, civil society, particularly youth voices. The event was co-sponsored by Ireland and Nigeria, emphasising the importance of research and the need for evidence-based policy to successfully implement SDG 8.

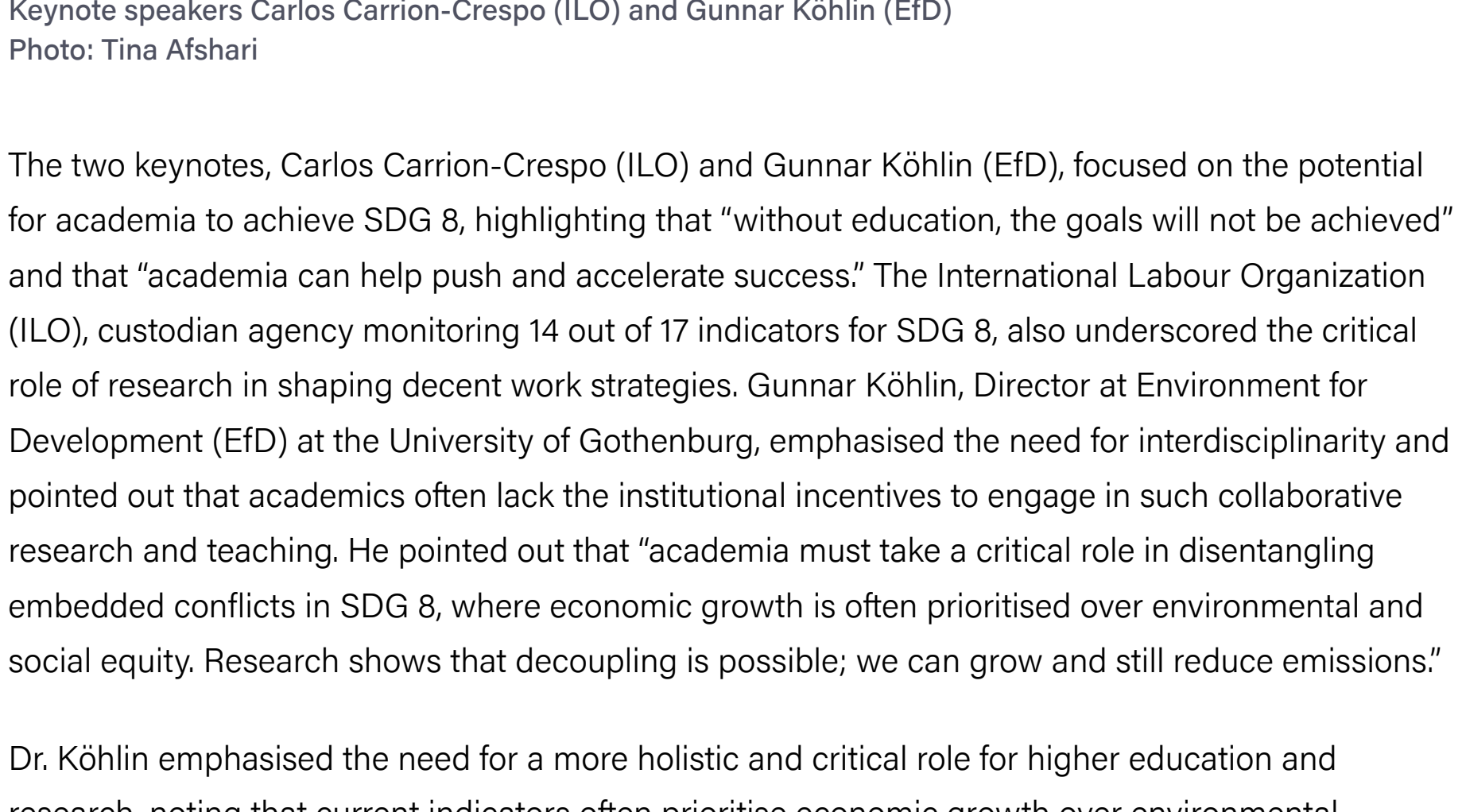
The side event was chaired by David Donaghue, former ambassador of Ireland to the UN and officially opened by Mr. Darragh O'Brien T.D., Ireland's Minister for Climate, Environment and Energy and Minister for Transport. The Minister underscored the urgency of the coming years for global progress. “The next five years are critical for delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals,” he noted, adding that “our national strategies rely on higher education to lead with innovation, honesty, and a commitment to shaping a just and equitable future.”

His remarks set the tone for a dynamic discussion focused on the power of research, teaching, and institutional collaboration in shaping inclusive and sustainable economic development.



Mr. Darragh O'Brien T.D., Ireland's Minister for Climate, Environment and Energy and Minister for Transport, H.E. Princess Adejoke of Nigeria and keynote speakers Carlos Carrion-Crespo (ILO) and Gunnar Köhlin (EfD)
Photo: Tina Afshari

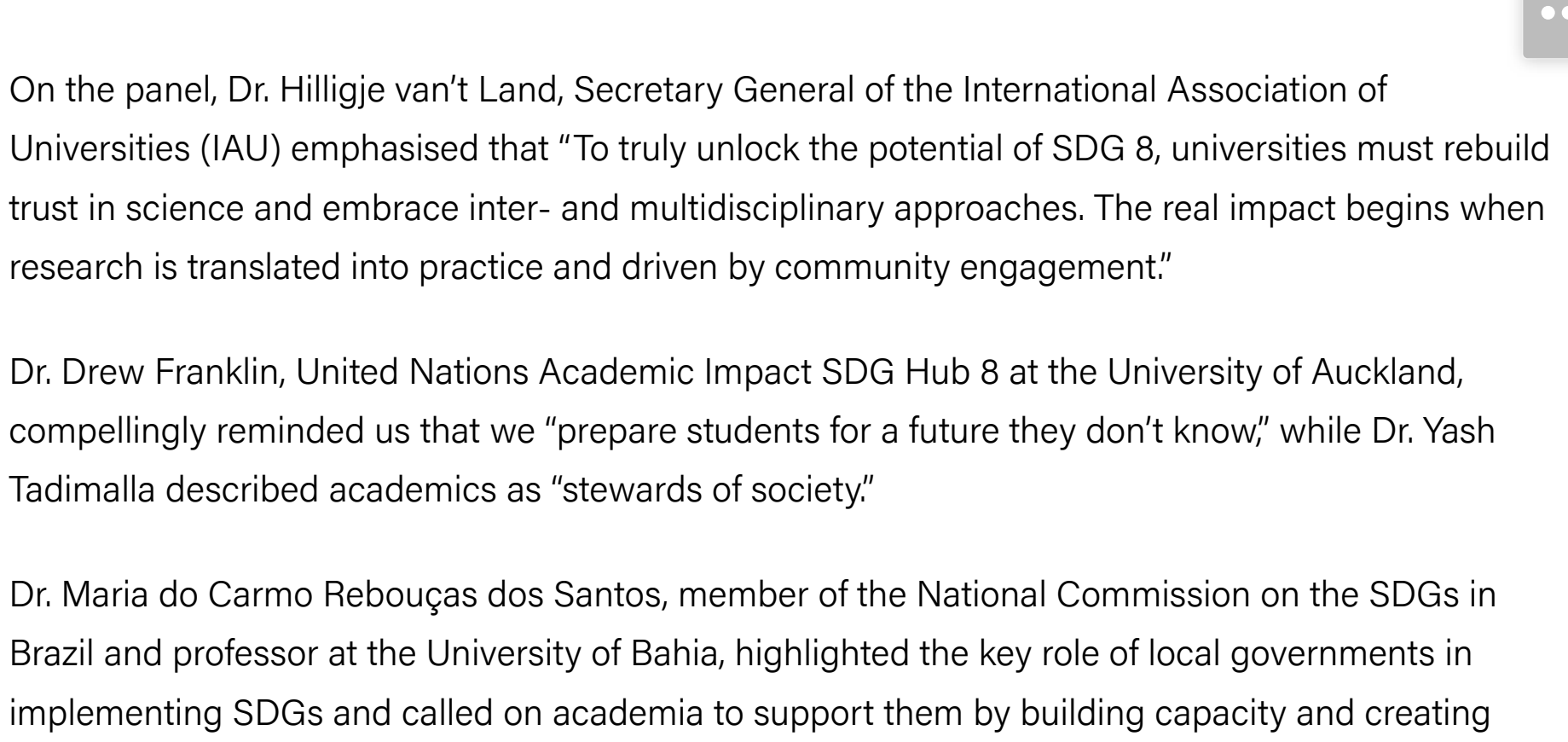
In her opening statement, H.E. Princess Adejoke, Nigeria, head of the Nigerian delegation to the HLPF, underlined the importance of academia for innovation, entrepreneurship, and the labour market. She provided the example of Nigeria creating an umbrella platform for the scientific and academic community to provide support and training to make sure that “graduates are not only employable, but capable” to contribute to inclusive and equal economic growth. She stressed that “without education, all goals cannot be achieved.”



Keynote speakers Carlos Carrion-Crespo (ILO) and Gunnar Köhlin (EfD)
Photo: Tina Afshari

The two keynotes, Carlos Carrion-Crespo (ILO) and Gunnar Köhlin (EfD), focused on the potential for academia to achieve SDG 8, highlighting that “without education, the goals will not be achieved” and that “academia can help push and accelerate success.” The International Labour Organization (ILO), custodian agency monitoring 14 out of 17 indicators for SDG 8, also underscored the critical role of research in shaping decent work strategies. Gunnar Köhlin, Director at Environment for Development (EfD) at the University of Gothenburg, emphasised the need for interdisciplinarity and pointed out that academics often lack the institutional incentives to engage in such collaborative research and teaching. He pointed out that “academia must take a critical role in disentangling embedded conflicts in SDG 8, where economic growth is often prioritised over environmental and social equity. Research shows that decoupling is possible; we can grow and still reduce emissions.”

Dr. Köhlin emphasised the need for a more holistic and critical role for higher education and research, noting that current indicators often prioritise economic growth over environmental sustainability and social equity. He posed the question: “What would it take for academia to have an impact?,” suggesting an increased attentiveness to needs of society, more collaborations, and openness to taking a policy focus as some possible avenues to explore for higher education.



On the panel, Dr. Hilligje van't Land, Dr. Drew Franklin, Dr. Yash Tadimalla and Dr. Maria do Carmo Rebouças dos Santos
Photo: Tina Afshari

On the panel, Dr. Hilligje van't Land, Secretary General of the International Association of Universities (IAU) emphasised that “To truly unlock the potential of SDG 8, universities must rebuild trust in science and embrace inter- and multidisciplinary approaches. The real impact begins when research is translated into practice and driven by community engagement.”

Dr. Drew Franklin, United Nations Academic Impact SDG Hub 8 at the University of Auckland, compellingly reminded us that we “prepare students for a future they don't know,” while Dr. Yash Tadimalla described academics as “stewards of society.”

Dr. Maria do Carmo Rebouças dos Santos, member of the National Commission on the SDGs in Brazil and professor at the University of Bahia, highlighted the key role of local governments in implementing SDGs and called on academia to support them by building capacity and creating mechanisms for research-based decision-making. She stressed the need for collaboration and ensuring that equity is left behind.


Participants reflected on key lessons from the past decade and explored forward-looking strategies for action beyond 2030. The University of Gothenburg contributed to the discussion through its open-access publication on SDG 8, which connects academic insights with policy recommendations aimed at achieving inclusive and sustainable economic progress. The growing voice of academia at the UN High-Level Political Forum demonstrates our shared commitment to leveraging academia for social and economic transformation. As the countdown to 2030 continues, universities have a central role in all SDGs, and in particular SDG 8, in designing and delivering solutions that ensure decent work and inclusive prosperity for all.

Book on Goal 8 in Agenda 2030

Achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal 8: Economic Growth and Decent Work for All is co-

edited by Lotta Dellve, Sharon Fonn, Gunnar Köhlin och Katrin Skagert.

[The book is available as open access via Routledge](#)

Area
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