

**Statement of MK Gilad Erdan
Minister of Environmental Protection of Israel
United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
Rio+20
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Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am truly honored to address you, on behalf of the State of Israel, on this momentous occasion. Let me begin by expressing my sincere thanks to the Government of Brazil for hosting one of the biggest and most important conferences in the history of the United Nations.

We are gathered here in Rio at a historic crossroads. We are here to make history, by shifting to a new economic paradigm and achieving sustainable development.

We all know that if we continue on the same path, a gloomy future awaits us.

There is no doubt that we are fast approaching the tipping point. Degradation of soil, water, oceans and biodiversity is an undeniable reality. One billion people have no access to safe drinking water. One billion people go hungry every day.

We have come here to ask ourselves:

How do we achieve sustainable development while at the same time ensuring our countries' prosperity and growth?

Mr. President,

Economic growth is a priority for all nations. But we have come to Rio to affirm that economic growth based on environmentally damaging and socially inequitable activities is no longer an option. We have established a framework for Green

Economy, which lays out the principles that will allow us to ensure that economic growth is compatible with sustainable development.

The time has come to exit our "comfort zone" of measuring economic growth simply by looking at GDP. GDP measures are not sufficient indicators of progress and wealth. We must develop a broader, more inclusive approach, in which we consider economic, social and environmental factors. These dimensions are inextricably linked, and must all be considered equally.

We must work hard to agree on concise, quantitative and holistic Sustainable Development Goals that reflect an approach that goes beyond GDP and measures **true** wellbeing. These goals must be streamlined in the work of all UN economic institutions.

Mr. President,

We still have the opportunity to be mindful of the flashing red lights, to stop, to reconsider our route, to change direction, and to influence change.

But we must work together. Cooperation and the sharing of knowledge and best practices are key to achieving our goals.

The State of Israel is eager to continue sharing its experiences with the world. As a country scarce in natural resources, developing cutting-edge technologies has always been crucial to our development and progress. Today, our technological innovations have positioned us as a world leader in overcoming the challenges of resource scarcity.

Since the establishment of our State, we have increased our agricultural production five-fold. And we did not increase our water allocation to do it. In fact, we decreased our allocation of fresh water to agriculture by almost 50 %. We have developed the world's most efficient drip irrigation technology. We reclaim nearly 80% of our wastewater for agricultural irrigation – the highest percentage in the world. We have developed advanced seawater desalination technologies. We have a remarkable track record in alternative energy. And we have spared no efforts to share our unique experience with both developed and developing countries.

Israel has shared its unique experience and expertise with the developing world through MASHAV, Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation. For over 50 years, it has directed activities in areas in which Israel has a comparative advantage- including poverty alleviation, food security, water resource management, desertification, and much more.

We are extending our development activities to every corner of the earth – including to our neighbors. But there is room for so much more to be done in the field of international development cooperation in our region.

We have just heard our neighbors speak here, at this very podium, about the development challenges that we all face. I had hoped that their message would not be politicized. I was surprised, or maybe not, that they did not miss the opportunity to once again, politicize a professional forum on issues that do not belong here.

Moreover, the figures they raised could not be farther from the truth. Allow me to share some facts. The Israeli-Palestinian interim agreement clearly states that both sides recognize the necessity to develop additional water for various uses.

Let me tell you that Israel is implementing much more of its part of the agreement, supplying the Palestinians with 60% more water than what it stipulates. Moreover, Israel continues to supply 5 million cubic meters of water annually to the Gaza Strip despite the fact that we completely disengaged from Gaza 7 years ago and all we get in return are terrorist rocket attacks on our civilians, as we have witnessed just yesterday. Is this the Palestinians' way to promote sustainable development?

I could have come here to share with you more facts about our Palestinian neighbors deliberately ignoring their sewage that pollutes the aquifer, or about their general lack of cooperation on environmental issues. But I would rather go back to the real subject at hand: let's really talk about sustainable development challenges of the world, where billions have NO access to clean safe drinking water.

I am here to say to our neighbors, let us seize the opportunity to meet our common development challenges and seek to overcome them, together, regardless of our differences. I would like to call on our Palestinian neighbors to finally implement the 28 projects of water system upgrades agreed upon.

I do agree with one thing from the Palestinian Minister's speech, and that is the need to come visit Israel and our region and to see for yourself that what he presented as fact is totally disconnected from reality.

Mr. President,

An ancient commentary to the story of the biblical Garden of Eden story teaches us that when God created the first man, He showed him all the trees in the Garden of Eden, and said: "See my Works, see how beautiful and perfect they are. Beware lest you spoil and destroy My world, for if you will spoil it, there is no one to repair it after you."

This Conference does not mark the end of a process, but the beginning of new one. Our work starts now. This is the moment of truth. And that truth is-- we are approaching the point of no return.

As we resolve to meet the challenges ahead, let us be big in our dreams and bold in our actions.

As the old saying goes: We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.

Mr. President,

Our children are counting on us.

Thank you.