

## **GENERAL STATEMENT OF TURKEY**

### **AT THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

#### **ORGANISED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL**

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Last year in New York City, world leaders have launched the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development in order to accelerate progress towards realizing the SDGs. However, shortly after the SDG Summit, COVID-19 cases have begun to break out and evolved into a global pandemic in a very short span of time, striking health systems, labor markets and economic activity. The world is currently witnessing the rapid changes imposed by the global coronavirus pandemic.

Over the past few months, access to the internet and digital tools have gained huge importance in our daily lives, as billions of people have experienced isolation and distant working to reduce the spread of the virus. Despite the rapid progress of Internet and artificial intelligence technologies, this crisis poses intensifying vulnerabilities and inequalities within and between countries – the very challenges that the SDGs are pursuing to address.

The current global health crisis, with extensive economic and social consequences, has worsened the already fragile state of the countries. The disruptions caused by the pandemic resulted in delays in policy implementation, increased burden on health protection, national budgets, and raised uncertainty about the future.

It is expected that COVID-19 could drive global poverty up for the first time since 1990s. For many millions of people, basic services like water, energy, healthcare and social protection remain out of reach and most countries lack the necessary infrastructure to deal with the challenges of the global economic and social crisis. The digital divide is also global; being extremely severe for the poorest countries without robust STI bases.

This collective problem already proved that overcoming these challenges also require strong cooperation, connectedness and solidarity. Looking at the positive impact, the current crisis forces countries to search for a new way to build a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient

future for all, to put people's well-being at the core of all efforts and to leave no one behind. Our pledge to act on SDGs in our national and global endeavors will help us to tackle the COVID-19-stricken systems. The SDGs are, after all, our shared agenda for an inclusive, sustainable and robust development and a sound future.

The epidemic has shown explicitly the necessity to keep the SDGs as the top priority in our development agenda. Turkey's messages for this years HLPF themes taking into account the impact of COVID-19 pandemic are as follows:

One of the deepest contractions is being experienced in the world economy because of COVID-19 outbreak reversing the achievements attained in Sustainable Development Goals. In the fight against the pandemic, countries have implemented various measures and have tried to keep adverse effects at a minimum scale.

Turkey's economy is also affected by the epidemic, especially due to the quarantine requirements to close off the economic activity. However, because of Turkey's demographic structure, strong, inclusive and extensive health care system, low public debt and public organizational structure that can take quick decisions, comparatively speaking Turkey had many advantages to fight the outbreak.

Turkish economy is experiencing a period of contraction, both in terms of production and demand, which is a common feature of all economies arising from economic lockdown. However, it is expected that Turkey will manage to keep this contraction period in a relatively short period.

Some rapid measures have been taken to protect the welfare of all segments of the society. The Economic Stability Shield Program has been launched in order to reduce the negative effects of COVID-19 outbreak on production, employment, markets and economy as a whole. Through this program, it is expected that production and employment will not be interrupted in every field of the economy and a rapid economic recovery is expected to follow an even faster economic progress.

The Economic Stability Shield Package also includes short-term working allowance and temporary income support for the workers whose workplaces have temporarily halted their

business operations. The program, in order to ensure continuity in employment, eases the costs for the employers by increasing two-month compensatory working period to four months.

There is no doubt that the epidemic will have long-term effects on all economies. However, it is noted that the duration of the downward spiral and the recovery speed are related to the countries' capacity to fight epidemics. So far, Turkey has successfully controlled the number of cases, thanks to strong healthcare system. The economy has started to give very strong signals that the worst shock that stems from the crisis has passed.

As a matter of fact, in the COVID-19 epidemic process, the most important advantage of Turkey proved to be its strong health infrastructure and the devoted work of its health personnel. In Turkey, public and private sector has made remarkable investments in health sector in the past two decades. In line with our universal health coverage system and “leaving no one behind” principle, all health care services, including testing and treatment, is offered free of charge to everyone, including 4 million refugees living in Turkey. During the outbreak, naturally health sector investments have gained priority once again and two emergency hospitals were built in İstanbul within only 45 days. Both hospitals have over 1000 beds capacity, of which 400 of them have intensive care units. Turkey pays special attention to the production of medicines and devices needed in the treatment.

In the early period of the epidemic, the Coronavirus Scientific Board was established within the Ministry of Health, consisting of scientists in the fields of infection, microbiology, virology, internal diseases, intensive care and chest diseases. The Scientific Board meets regularly on the subject and measures are taken for pandemic in line with the decisions of the Board.

In this process, strict measures were taken to minimize the risk of contamination and reduce the intensity in healthcare facilities. Measures have been developed to meet the needs of patients with chronic diseases without having to go to health facilities. The public is regularly informed by Minister of Health about the advancement of the COVID-19 cases on a daily basis. Additionally, people are informed about pandemic hospitals for reaching out.

In order to inform the people about COVID-19 epidemic prevention methods, information packages were prepared and the public was informed by using all types of communication tools. The Ministry of Health has prepared guidelines on steps to be taken in each sector.

During the epidemic of COVID-19, which affected almost all of the aspects of the society, measures were taken to support all segments, especially the fragile groups. In order to decrease the infection rate of COVID-19, stay-at-home-orders were put into force. During these lockdowns, specific needs of the elderly were provided by civil servants in the field, and the digital education system, which Turkey has been developing in recent years, was put into practice. Turkey has launched the Social Protection Shield Program to cater its citizens' urgent needs during the pandemic. This program includes services such as short-time work allowance, unemployment benefits, cash support and social assistance. More than six million households have been reached through this program. Turkey also postponed taxes, social security premiums and loans of many small and medium sized companies.

Turkey not only met the needs of its own citizens but also responded to the needs of more than 130 countries and shared our country's experiences in combating the COVID-19 outbreak. In the early stages of the epidemic, hospitals and health facilities in some countries which were previously built or renovated by Turkish International Cooperation Agency were converted into pandemic hospitals and started to actively fight against the epidemic. Urgent demands on masks, disinfectants, protective kits of those facilities were also met. In addition, nearly 1 million masks and thousands of protective clothing, food and cleaning sets were distributed to more than 150,000 families to support the fight against the epidemic and meet humanitarian needs. The support is planned to be accessible to more than 1.2 million people.

Moreover, over 300,000 masks have been produced in various countries through local manufacturers supported by Turkey. In the coming days, in order to strengthen the capacity of the partner countries in the field of health, the on-going training programs are envisaged to be extended for increasing the opportunities. Turkey, believing in the importance of global solidarity, has taken its place in the Alliance for Poverty Eradication.