



State of Israel
Minister of Environmental Protection

General Statement by

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Minister of Environmental Protection
State of Israel

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**Madam President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council;
Excellencies,**

The SDGs are a major accomplishment of multilateralism. The Goals reflect the aspirations and priorities of all Member States, and draw on the collective knowledge of Governments, international bodies, civil society and research institutions around the world.

Now, just as we enter the Decade of Action for SDG implementation – the last push to accelerate progress toward our shared vision of development – the world has been gripped by a health crisis not seen for a century. COVID-19 has damaged our capacity to move forward on the Goals, and is even challenging the progress already made. With the looming threats of increased poverty, soaring unemployment and reduced revenue, many countries are in crisis mode. Some are even retreating inward, away from multilateralism. This would be a mistake.

The COVID-19 crisis highlights the global character of interactions between humans and nature. From knowledge-sharing to travel to cooperation in science and medicine, we cannot live in isolation. But we already knew this: the COVID-19 pandemic now sweeping the globe appeared against the backdrop of two major pre-existing crises: climate change and biodiversity loss. These global emergencies demand that we maintain, even increase the pace of multilateral cooperation. As Israel's Minister of Environmental Protection, I am directing all my energies toward maintaining this momentum.



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Evidence clearly shows that investments in policies that also address climate change and biodiversity loss bring greater economic, social and environmental benefits in the long term. When we design stimulus and recovery packages, we should prioritize jobs in the renewable energy sector, along with green building, waste reduction and recycling. When we invest in infrastructure, it should include public transportation, e-mobility, and carbon capture and storage facilities. Support to industries should be linked to greenhouse gas reduction, pollution prevention and materials efficiency, and construction projects should take into account the preservation and restoration of ecosystems.

The scale of world-wide investments in recovery and stimulus was unimaginable just six months ago. Especially now – when we are trying to encourage recovery packages, we must remember that policies that create **transformative changes** in climate change and biodiversity loss bring greater economic, social and environmental benefits in the long term. This has inspired us to draw up plans of what to include in an Israel Green Deal. Our proposal includes a move away from all fossil fuels to increased renewables including in transportation, energy efficiency in industry and in local authorities, green building with a focus on public construction. We are implementing policies for a circular economy which eliminates waste through the continual use of resources and are emphasizing climate resilience and adaptation including through the adoption of ecosystem restoration and nature based solutions. These policies will create thousands of jobs together with substantial economic savings while providing platforms for cleantech and other innovation. All these find expression in the goals and targets of the SDGs.



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While Israel is dealing with the COVID-19 crisis at home, we continue to look outward. For example, we are harnessing our strength in technological innovation and have joined the global effort to deal with the pandemic. Over 70 Israeli companies are focused on combatting COVID-19, including through prevention, protection, and treatment. Our global vision also extends to climate change and biodiversity loss. In this regard, I would like to mention "Desertech", a new center being set up in the south of Israel for the development of desert-related technologies, providing tailor-made adaptation solutions for clients world-wide. This center will build on Israel's strengths in the field of water technologies and reuse, resource-efficient agriculture and climate adapted construction. This expertise can be used to help achieve the SDGs – particularly for countries in our own dry and semi-arid region.

These global efforts do not diminish the need for solutions to the most immediate problems. It does mean, however, that we have to keep our eyes on more than one pressing issue at the same time.

The role of the UN System has become more critical. It collects and analyses data to support countries in their science-based decision-making and coordinates efforts for immediate and long-term relief. The UN System must respond quickly and professionally, putting politics aside and using the integrative approach of the SDGS.

The policy steps we take now will have lasting effects on the global economy and will shape societies for many years to come. The way we treat our planet must change. This is the time, and every nation must contribute. Multilateralism and the UN is part of this process.