

Launching the decade of action at a time of crisis: Keeping the focus on the SDGs while combatting COVID-19

7 July 2020

Address by Ms. Krystyna Marty Lang
State Secretary, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland

Madam Chair,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We probably all had a different situation in mind when we launched the Decade of Action. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are reminded that our progress towards a more sustainable world is still on shaky ground.

In light of the magnitude of this pandemic, we cannot respond in silos. Building back better calls for more coherent, risk-informed and prevention-focused approaches that look at the interlinkages between the SDGs and integrate all three pillars of the United Nations to reduce the collateral damages of a pandemic. The principle of leaving no one behind has gained new importance and should guide us in all our actions – now more than ever.

Let me highlight four aspects:

First, our actions have to be future-proof. The extraordinary economic COVID-19 support packages should pave the way to socially inclusive and environmentally sound recovery. We must avoid investment decisions that risk a lock-in of emissions and negative effects on biodiversity for years to come. Rather, investments should build on sound framework conditions and support future-oriented business models and sustainable trade, allowing the private sector to play a key role in a sustainable recovery.

Second, trust needs to be maintained. The crisis has highlighted the importance of effective, accountable and transparent institutions that enjoy the trust of the population even when drastic measures are taken. We realized in Switzerland how crucial it is for the trust in our institutions, for democracy and the rule of law that special powers granted are lawful, proportionate and time-bound.

Third, transformations should be evidence- and data-based. As the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) has clearly outlined, reliable data and statistics as well as strong science-policy interface are key to support evidence-based decision-making, also in times of crisis. It is in this context that Switzerland will host the next UN World Data Forum, postponed to 2021.

Fourth, opportunities should be seized. The crisis offers a window of opportunity to rethink how we work and travel in the era of digitalization. There is growing willingness to redesign dialogue and cooperation by embracing innovative ideas and technologies. We should make use of these experiences to further promote sustainable development everywhere.

Excellencies,

In late March, Secretary-General António Guterres said: *“When we get past this crisis – which we will – we will face a choice. We can go back to the world as it was before or deal decisively with those issues that make us all unnecessarily vulnerable to crises.”*

Our choice is clear: Switzerland is committed to contribute to a world that is better equipped for future systemic shocks and disasters. With the 2030 Agenda we already have a shared blueprint for a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable recovery. Let's build on it.

Thank you.