

Statement by H.E. Mr. Arararat Mirzoyan, First Deputy Prime Minister of Armenia
High-level Political Forum
Voluntary National Review
17 July 2018, New York

Honorable Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I address the 2018 High-level Political Forum and present the Republic of Armenia's first Voluntary National Review. This gathering is an excellent opportunity to reaffirm Armenia's commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The High-level Political Forum is well placed to address issues of our Global Agenda and to showcase our collective political will and commitment to a better future for our peoples and our countries.

This spring, as many of you are perhaps aware, was an exciting and dramatic time for our Republic. Our new Government came to power through a democratic and peaceful revolution that captured the imagination of many in Armenia and beyond. I see clear parallels between our revolution and what we are doing right now right in this hall. Let me dwell upon it in some more detail.

In my country, for many years, we dreamt of a democratic Armenia with the rule of law, respect for human rights, including the right to form government through free and fair elections, a high level of transparency and accountability in the public administration, efficient and good governance, strong progress in fighting corruption, a free and genuinely competitive economy, strong social institutions, and all in all, a country with free, proud, prospering, and happy citizens.

To make this dream come true, we tried on and on, we tried hard, we lost several attempts and had unrecoverable losses, but we never put up, we never gave up, and we never surrendered. We kept our dream of a better Armenia bright in our hearts and in our minds, and we never stopped dreaming and trying again and again and again. And finally, we succeeded.

During the last days of March, we started our new steps with just a few followers: we marched throughout our small, but at the same time great country for a couple of weeks, in the snow, the rain, and the burning sun; we then entered Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, with some hundred people, and in another two to three weeks, in the last days of our absolutely peaceful movement, there were over one million active participants in practically all the streets and squares of all the cities, towns, and villages of the country. We were enjoying the total support of our society and, therefore, victory was inevitable.

And now we, as a legitimate government of a democratic country, have a clear understanding and will to implement our mandate: to reevaluate the so-called civil pact, the social contract between the state and its citizens, and to restart the process of state-building, launching wide-ranging fundamental reforms aimed at eradicating corruption, creating transparent, accountable, and efficient governance, safeguarding human rights and the rule of law, ensuring independence of the judiciary, and advancing economic growth through a free and competitive business environment and a favorable atmosphere for investments. I want to be very clear. For Armenia's new leadership, this is not just a political statement; these are the core values of the revolution and ours personally, values that ought to come to life.

Now, turning to the parallels. As I mentioned, we had faith in our mission, we put everything at stake, we stood firm, and we won. And now, we are going to act. This is, I believe, what we all should do in order to address the challenges that humanity faces today and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. This is what humanity needs to do in order to eliminate poverty, hunger, and malnutrition in all its forms; to ensure safe and affordable drinking water for all; to fight against diseases and to ensure good health and well-being; to provide inclusive and quality education; to invest in clean energy sources such as solar, wind and thermal; to minimize disaster risks brought along by climate change; to safeguard equal rights for women; to significantly decrease income inequalities; to preclude all forms of violence; and so on. With faith in our mission, a clear vision, a strong will, and of course global cooperation and regional partnership we shall win this battle.

In Armenia, the non-violent democratic revolution has unleashed new opportunities and instilled a new sense of hope, which will help accelerate our implementation of the SDGs. According to the UN and the SDG framework, an accelerator is an intervention that removes bottlenecks and systemic barriers to SDG Implementation. In this sense, the revolution is our greatest SDG accelerator of all. It has removed the single largest bottleneck to sustainable development: the lack of political will.

Now, a few words about Armenia's Voluntary National Review. It encompasses the key circumstances and factors underlying the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), as well as the processes and key findings of a six-month detailed study of the country's policies and performance, along with multi-stakeholder participatory discussions.

The report starts with brief highlights about the recent economic, social and political developments in Armenia, in order to form an understanding of the context in which the voluntary national review took place. The discussion draws on Armenia's experience of SDG nationalization, currently in progress, with a

country-wide participatory effort, as well as on the SDG implementation effort with due consideration given to the discussion of the role and process of voluntary national review in Armenia.

The VNR process in Armenia was complex – as it was in many other countries – and involved a number of interrelated efforts, which can be grouped as follows: (i) policy effort, (ii) data effort, (iii) institutional effort, and (iv) dialogue effort.

The report looked at the national strategic framework, including sector-specific strategies and policies, and its linkages with SDGs in terms of coverage of the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social, and environmental. The strategy shall be supported through an institutional framework to move SDG nationalization and SDG implementation efforts forward. Armenia has developed a dedicated institutional framework, including: Post-2015 Task Force; National Council of Sustainable Development; SDG Nationalization Inter-Agency Task Force; and National SDG Innovation Lab.

The key findings of the VNR in relation to SDG implementation in Armenia are discussed in detail, including areas of progress, areas of concern, challenges, good practices and innovations and opportunities for solutions. There is a particular focus on the goals and targets covered under the main topic of the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development - “transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”. The transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies requires a shift in approaches, mechanisms and modes of cooperation. It is not about only Government policies or actions, but also about real and active involvement of every member of society, businesses, and civil society organizations.

The fact that the VNR process coincided with the process of formation of the new leadership in Armenia has provided a strong momentum for multiplying the SDG effort and searching for new ways to further accelerate SDG implementation. The VNR provided a clearer picture of the situation and added a sense of urgency, which, certainly, is a strong motivation to multiply our efforts with greater efficiency and effectiveness. The VNR is a good chance for our Government to assess the works done in the scope of the SDG and shape opportunities for innovative and impactful solutions towards achieving the vision of a “New Armenia,” as we call it in Armenia. Our goal is to achieve real changes in Armenia, which will ensure freedom, happiness, and prosperity of our citizens.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that we are fully determined to implement the most ambitious reforms. We believe, however, that the international community will share this journey with us.

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