

[Video package]

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thought we should start by hearing the voices of Ireland's youth, because issues at the core of the Sustainable Development Goals, such as quality education, a clean environment, economic opportunity, and peaceful and inclusive societies, all impact on young peoples' quality of life today, as well as in the future.

So, as we implement the Goals, we owe it to those young people to demonstrate not only ambition, but also urgency.

Achieving the SDGs by 2030 requires action now.

Ireland is proud of our role in the SDGs' creation, through the work of our former Ambassador David Donoghue who, together with his co-facilitator from Kenya, Ambassador Macharia Kamau, convinced the global community to agree to the most ambitious set of commitments in the UN's history.

But as proud as we are of what's already been achieved, we need to do more.

Ireland has therefore adopted a 'whole-of-Government' approach to the SDGs.

The Taoiseach, Ireland's Prime Minister, is centrally involved, and every Government Minister has responsibility for implementing specific Goals and Targets.

As Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I have specific responsibility for coordinating SDG implementation across Government.

This year, I launched Ireland's 1st SDG National Implementation Plan, which focuses on raising public awareness and engagement, and on-aligning Ireland's national policies with the Goals.

The Plan sets out how Ireland will fully implement the SDGs at home, and contribute to their achievement globally. It also underlines our commitment under the SDGs to Leaving No One Behind and reaching the furthest behind first.

One of the Plan's key actions was the establishment of a national SDG Stakeholder Forum, which had its first meeting last month.

This Forum should be a venue for genuine dialogue between stakeholders and Government, where we can work together to develop innovative approaches to implementing the SDGs, and also challenge each other to deliver on the transformative ambition of the Goals. We will all have to leave our comfort zones, if we are to achieve a just transition that recognises the needs of all our people, sectors and communities.

I was responsible for producing this Voluntary National Review, but this has also been a whole-of-Government process.

For me, the most exciting aspect of the SDGs is the way they force Governments and ministries to break away from the old 'silo thinking' that says 'this is someone else's problem', or worse, 'we have no solutions'.

What the SDGs are really about is getting Governments *and* society to think and act differently. It's not about ideology it's about implementation, in real and practical terms. That ultimately is our goal.

Achieving the 17 Goals will only be achieved by breaking down traditional policy silos and developing new transparent partnership with stakeholders so that everyone in society can contribute to making the SDGs a reality.

This Review addresses Ireland's response to all 17 of the SDGs and, using almost 100 statistical indicators, assesses Ireland's performance under each Goal.

It also discusses how Ireland is supporting the SDGs globally.

The Review includes a national Policy Map which shows how Ireland is addressing each of the 169 SDG targets.

I hope that this can draw attention to some of the innovative economic, social and environmental policies which Ireland has adopted.

But we have been equally transparent about where we need to perform better.

The Review confirms that Ireland's has a thriving economy but that we still have work to do in order to be the kind of truly sustainable society that we want our children to grow up in, and where we ourselves want to grow old.

Specifically, the Review identifies Ireland's strengths in relation to **education, health, economic growth, innovation, some environmental issues such as air quality, and a peaceful and safe society.**

However, we also face challenges in many areas, including addressing high levels of **obesity, meeting our own national poverty targets, achieving sustainable consumption and production, protecting our marine and terrestrial habitats, and achieving full gender equality** in Irish society.

Two major challenges for Ireland relate to **housing and climate action.**

The Government has acknowledged pressures on housing supply, and the consequent increasing house prices and rents and the high incidence of homelessness as one of the most pressing challenges currently facing Ireland. The Review discusses this in detail and sets out Government's response through its **Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness - Rebuilding Ireland.**

For example, we are determined as a Government to increase Ireland's stock of social housing by 50,000 homes by 2021, with the necessary funding being ring-fenced to achieve this.

As Minister with responsibility for Climate Action, I have been forthright in saying that, as a country, Ireland is playing catch-up on our obligations in relation to climate change.

But this year the Government adopted an ambitious overarching policy initiative, **Project Ireland 2040**, to make Ireland a better country for all our people, a country that reflects the best of who we are and what we aspire to be, and builds on our objectives as a country to deliver on the SDGs

It includes a new National Planning Framework and a 10-year National Development Programme, which provides for nearly €116 billion of capital investment, that's 4% of Irish GDP.

And one fifth of that, that's 0.8% of Ireland's GDP, €22 billion, will be spent on a climate focused investment plan.

Project Ireland 2040 also includes a Climate Action fund in excess of €500m, which is €126 for every person in our country, making it the biggest per capita fund of its type in the world. This fund is a blank canvas; I believe it will stimulate innovative ideas and deliver concrete projects that will contribute towards Ireland's climate and energy targets, while also addressing fuel poverty.

Project Ireland 2040 represents a step-change in Ireland's approach to investment, both in the scale of our ambition and the funding that we're making available as a Government to meet the challenges Ireland faces.

As such it will be central to our achievement of the SDGs at home.

Of course we will also continue to support the Goals globally, through partnerships, especially in Africa and with small island developing states, and in multilateral fora.

Today we face shared global challenges that require shared solutions.

Ireland will play our part in these solutions, from our facilitation of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016, to our role as Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women.

We are providing €2 million support to the Adaptation Fund this year to support international climate adaptation through projects like the Great Green Wall initiative in Africa. We are also supporting initiatives tackling the gender impacts of climate change through UNFCCC.

We are a strong and consistent champion for disarmament and the need to restrict the use of nuclear weapons. This is why we are seeking election to the UN Security Council in 2020.

Our international development cooperation and our humanitarian action, along with our work at the UN on human rights, peacekeeping, disarmament and security, is at the heart of our efforts to create a more secure, stable and inclusive world.

Our own history of famine, conflict and migration propels Ireland's international outreach and engagement.

This is why our aid, when it is provided, is 100% untied.

Ireland will produce a new international development policy in 2018. Our ambition is to continue to deliver upon collective aspirations for a better world as set out in the SDGs. Our new policy will prioritise:

'Leave No One Behind', particularly for women and girls, with interventions on gender equality, peace, education, sexual and reproductive health, and on nutrition and sustainable agriculture will be central.

Doubling our global footprint, and expanding our development cooperation to include West and North Africa. We will also be able to do more in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and Small Island Developing States.

And making sustainable progress towards achieving the 0.7% UN target by 2030.

Irish influence throughout the SDG negotiations stands as an example of our commitment to a better world.

We are determined to show the same global leadership in the *implementation* of the SDGs.

This Review is an important milestone on Ireland's journey to 2030, demonstrating our ongoing commitment to the Global Goals and the scope of the work ahead of us.

Now I will conclude as I started, by drawing attention to the importance of youth voices and inviting Ireland's UN Youth Delegates to address the Forum.

Thank You.

[UN Youth Delegate Lauren Flanagan]

Distinguished President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen -

Young people are acutely aware of the importance of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and the consequences of not doing so. In preparation for Ireland's Voluntary National Review, we as Ireland's UN youth delegates undertook consultations with young people to gather their main messages and asks of our Government and the international community when implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

Young people in Ireland see the Sustainable Development Goals as a crucial opportunity to further human rights and a life of dignity for all. But young people know that in order to ensure that each person benefits from the SDGs equally, the international community, States and various stakeholders, including youth, must work together and seek to achieve the Goals through cooperation.

Addressing poverty and inequality both nationally and internationally were two of the most important Goals for the young people we spoke to, particularly for vulnerable communities like refugees, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and women. In order to address poverty experienced by young people, there were calls for greater action to be taken in providing better access to decent jobs with proper remuneration, including at UN level. Although young people felt that Goal 1 would be the most difficult to achieve, they felt it would have the greatest impact and called for strong leadership in eradicating poverty.

[UN Youth Delegate Paul Dockery]

Mental health and well-being was one of the most important issues raised by young people in Ireland. As expected, the issues Lauren has mentioned result in very worrying youth mental health statistics.

A 2017 report by UNICEF showed that Ireland has the 4th highest teen suicide rate among EU and OECD member states. One in every 1,000 young people aged 15-19 in Ireland dies by suicide. It also found that 22.6% of Irish children aged 11-15 reported experiencing two or more psychological symptoms more than once a week. In our consultations with youth mental health advocates, it was widely agreed that a more accessible, age-appropriate mental health service is needed than what we currently have.

However, we must acknowledge that this is Ireland's starting point. We are now aware of what issues young people want resolved, and which Goals take precedence.

We wish to thank our Government's delegation for including us here today – because in doing so, Ireland recognises that empowering and including young people is key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

2018.07.Sustainable Development Goals. They're for us. They're for us. They're for us. For us. The Global Goals are for everyone.

In 2015 Ireland co-facilitated the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in New York. Of all the indicators attached to the goals, 1 in 5 relate to young people.

Good Health. Wellbeing. Quality Education. We picked those global goals because we wanted everyone to try and get a chance of doing everything in life.

We're making fair trade biscuits. We're focusing on these goals mainly. No poverty, good health and wellbeing, quality education, decent work and economic growth. When you buy fair trade things the farmers get the amount of money that they need.

We're trying to up-cycle the clothes. We learned about the UN Global Goals, about what cotton does to the world with insecticide. If we use second hand clothes that's like the first stage to making the world a better place.

It's very encouraging to see so many young people and children now engaged with the Sustainable Development Goals. They really are now part of the conversation in Ireland and while of course the government has the obligation to give leadership, to educate, to set policy and funding in order to deliver on our commitments, what is happening in Ireland now is that this is becoming a societal effort where everybody feels part of the challenge.

We have supported students from over 1,000 schools to complete projects looking at how the Sustainable Development Goals can be achieved in their communities. Every year the Irish Aid Science for Development Award is given to a student who can successfully show how scientific innovation can be used to achieve one or more of the goals.

I'm targeting a gene in potatoes to improve the overall health status of the crop.

I wanted to bring more awareness to the drought problems in South Africa and in this day and age any solution is a good one.

My project is about using genetic engineering to purify cholera infected water for people so they can then drink safely.

The Science for Development Award goes to Timothy McGrath.

Since 2015, we have also sponsored two Youth Delegates to give a voice to Ireland's young people at the United Nations. This year, their Generation for Change report looked at how young people can positively contribute to Ireland's implementation of the goals.

The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals increasingly determine the work we do here every single day. We have committed to leaving no one behind and of course to reaching the furthest behind first. Ireland believes we can only do that collectively, in partnership.

It's easy, you can do just the smallest things and it can make a big difference.

They're for me. They're for you. They're for us!